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**SUSIE V.C. CHAPMAN BSc Hons**

**Children's Stories of Parental Relationship Breakdown  
and of their Relationship with their Non-resident Parent**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the  
Open University for the degree of Doctor of Clinical Psychology

September 1999

**SALOMONS  
CANTERBURY CHRIST CHURCH UNIVERSITY COLLEGE**

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## **DECLARATION OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

In order to preserve confidentiality of participants, the names of people and places have been changed. In addition, details of employment and any other information that could identify the participants have been altered or removed. Where a participant's style of speech is distinctive e.g. catch phrases or verbal mannerisms, these have been removed or changed whilst maintaining the meaning of the text.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to give a special thanks to all the participants for giving up their time and talking so eloquently and openly and to the people who have helped with recruitment and the advice necessary to make this research possible.

Thanks to Sue Holttum, my main research supervisor, for all her help and support with this research and to Gwyn Carter for her ideas. My year group deserve a big 'thank you' for putting up with me when I was at my most stressed.

Finally, I wish to thank my loving and wonderful parents, Ming and Mike Arnold for their unceasing support and valuable contributions to this research.

## **ABSTRACT**

Britain has seen dramatic social changes to family life due to the growth of divorce and separation, producing burgeoning divorce literature. Surprisingly, relatively few studies have taken into account children's views of their experiences.

The present study investigated children's stories of 'parental relationship breakdown' (PRB) and of their relationships with their non-resident parent. Twenty-seven children and their resident parent, were interviewed. Detailed qualitative analysis was conducted on the interviews of 18 children. The parent interview was structured to obtain background details of PRB, after which the parent completed a standardised measure of their child's behaviour. The child interview was child-led. After the interview the children completed a standardised self-esteem measure. Narrative analysis provided a precis of the children's stories in order to examine the main events they incorporated, and grounded theory was used to analyse the detail of the child's experience.

The majority of the children old enough to recall pre-PRB family life seemed to have an assumption about its permanency, the separation of the parents promoting doubts about their continued loveability and sense of being held in mind by the non-resident parent. Although children employed various strategies hypothesised as addressing these doubts, parents' handling of the situation also appeared to play a major part in how the children made sense of their experiences and contained their anxieties.

Tentative recommendations are that personal meanings of PRB for children (particularly regarding their perceived relationships with their parents) needs to be understood by both parents and clinicians in order to help children better contain feelings arising from the PRB. Families could benefit from more access to advice, support and information about the impending separation and events thereafter.

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## **PART I      REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **1.      Introduction**

This study attempted to examine experiences of 'parental relationship breakdown' (PRB)<sup>1</sup> from children's perspectives and particularly children's relationships with their non-resident parent (NRP)<sup>2</sup>. The author aimed to move away from preconceived notions of PRB experience based upon adult assumptions, and towards a more child-centred approach to research (Greig and Taylor, 1999). Children remain a relatively unheard population (Fortin, 1998) in research, in the family, and in wider contexts (Simpson, 1989).

In the review that follows, the author outlines literature on the socio-political, developmental and psychological contexts of children's experiences of PRB that informed and orientated the author. This will be followed by a brief description of the divorce literature specifically as it relates to children's relationship with their non-resident parent (NRP). The author's main criticism of the divorce literature (based upon a broad literature search) was the lack of integrative theoretical bases for research (Wallerstein, 1991). Generally, narrow theoretical perspectives have been taken, based upon discrete phenomena that have limited theory-practice links.

Some clinical implications of this research arise from the observation that theory-based interventions are rare and group intervention outcomes are very mixed (Lee, Picard and Blain, 1994). Despite PRB being a common precipitant for clinical referral, literature on

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<sup>1</sup> See Definition in Appendix 1. Since there is a dearth of research on separation (married and unmarried) specifically, generally the author has assumed that similar psychological processes could potentially be applied to both circumstances. To reflect a principle of inclusion, the term 'parental relationship breakdown' was used to encompass both circumstances.

<sup>2</sup> Non-resident parent (NRP) refers to the parent who formally or informally has relinquished their child's day-to-day care and permanent residency to the resident parent (RP).

clinical intervention is lacking. A lack of clear evidence-based guidelines for parents, teachers and practitioners is currently failing children and their parents (Emery, Kitzmann and Waldron, 1999).

## **2. Socio-political Context**

The divorce rate for 1995 was just over 155, 000 couples each year in England and Wales (Haskey, 1997) with 55 per cent of divorcing couples having one or more children under the age of 16. There are no accurate UK statistics on the number of children who have experienced parental separation out of wedlock (Haskey, 1999, personal communication).

The number of children experiencing significant and permanent change in the family structure due to PRB is unknown but extrapolated data suggest that, by 2000, around 3 million children will be affected by divorce or separation, equivalent to 25% of all children before they reach 16 years (Haskey, 1997). As a result of these and other social changes, Cockett and Tripp (1994) warn "social changes affecting families have made it more likely that the needs of parents will not always coincide with those of their children"(p53).

The Children Act 1989 has changed the face of State involvement in family life by making a non-interventionist shift, giving parents greater autonomy to control family life and thus to make decisions that impact on their children's future at the time of PRB <sup>3</sup>. Concern has been raised that mediation initiatives "may not produce an outcome which takes account of the children's views" (Fortin, 1998, p167). Mediation has not been

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<sup>3</sup> A proviso is attached where parents sharing responsibility for decision-making would not be in the best interests of the child.

found to promote the mental health of either children or parents (Emery, et al., 1999).

It would appear that the current socio-political context has meant that many children are exposed to PRB, with little social recognition of their experiences or viewpoints. A number of theoretical perspectives will be examined that inform the reader about some of the individual and interpersonal factors that may influence children's experience and interpretation of PRB.

### **3. Theoretical Context**

Few researchers appear to have attempted to map a theoretical basis upon which to understand the psychological processes in PRB. However, Wallerstein (1991) identified two main theoretical strands, the psychoanalytical-clinical perspective employed by Wallerstein and by Kalter (e.g. Kalter, 1987) and a risk-resiliency perspective principally employed by Hetherington (e.g. Hetherington, 1999). Before examining this literature, the author aims to orientate the reader to relevant developmental, cognitive and attachment theory literature.

#### **3.1 Developmental Perspectives**

The significant long-term effects of PRB on children at multiple stages in their development (reviewed by Wallerstein, 1991) highlights the importance of taking a longitudinal developmental perspective beyond the separation itself. Most accounts of developmental factors influencing PRB are based upon Piaget's (1951) developmental stage model. Rutter (1994) confirmed the observation that children move through a systematic developmental process that cannot be by-passed, making some of Piaget's observations useful markers.

Developmental theory suggests that development mediates interpretation of PRB events (Schwartz, 1992). Egocentric and over-generalised thinking, believed by Piaget to characterise children under seven, can lead to children blaming themselves for PRB and using 'magical thinking' as a means of denying what is happening. As children enter the concrete operational stage at around seven years, they begin to comprehend other people's motives and to think more abstractly, enabling them to separate from their parents' relationship, yet they remain vulnerable to parental rejection (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980). From about age 12 onwards, children develop more differentiated, abstract and interpersonal reasoning (Selman, 1980) enabling them to examine hypothetical scenarios and judge subtle interpersonal manoeuvres.

Despite the evidence for stages in children's cognitive development, Schwartz (1992) views as a myth the assumption that children can be too young to understand. Children's failure to report distress as a young child in retrospective research (such as Mitchell, 1985) can be misleading as reports may reflect poor memory and verbal skills at the time rather than lower levels of distress (Schwartz, 1992). Siegal (1991) highlighted the importance of professionals' awareness of limitations of children's language development which could moderate children's situational awareness and expression. Piaget's assumption of egocentrism of young children was countered by Donaldson (1978), demonstrating that given the right contextual cues, young children can imagine others' perspectives. In short, there is a growing body of literature suggesting that Piaget's deficit model underestimates children's cognitive abilities and so their capacity to make sense of PRB events. Cognitive perspectives are discussed in greater detail in the next section.

### **3.2 Cognitive Perspectives**

There are numerous cognitive perspectives applied to children including a focus upon identifying dysfunctional beliefs about divorce (Kurdek and Berg, 1983), 'shattered assumptions' about the self and the world (Janoff-Bulman, 1992), and causal PRB beliefs (Kim, Sandler and Tein, 1997).

*Working with Dysfunctional Beliefs* - Kurdek and Berg (1983) found that older children's superior cognitive abilities were an important mediating factor to adjustment since they were more able to make sense of events and assess their own role in, and gain a sense of control over, the process. They identified six problematic beliefs commonly seen in children, particularly younger children: 1) thoughts of abandonment 2) being to blame 3) expectations of peer ridicule 4) rejection 5) fantasies about parental re-unification and 6) parental blame. It has been suggested that psychological intervention with younger children to develop their cognitive skills may be beneficial.

*Beliefs about Causality* - Kim, et al. (1997) found that 'unknown' causes of events, even positive events, increased psychological symptoms in children aged 8-12 in a US sample. This suggests that understanding 'why' events occur may act as a buffer for divorce stress. This evidence appears particularly important as many PRB events are beyond children's control and the cause is generally complex. Janoff-Bulman's (1992) work on trauma suggested that not knowing the cause of events may increase a person's sense of vulnerability, as they are unable to reassure themselves of the future. This relates to the child's sense of control over their world.

*Coping Appraisal* - The work of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggests that children's interpretation of their situation (in terms of their appraisal of their coping resources) may influence how successfully they cope with family-related stress.

### **3.3 Attachment Theory**

*Internal Working Models (IWMs)* – The 'attachment behavioural system' is:

“a blueprint or model of the world in which the self and significant others and their interrelationship are represented and which encodes the particular pattern of attachment shown by the individual” (Holmes, 1993, p68).

This concept is derived from psychoanalytic ideas but closely resembles cognitive models such as self-schemas (Beck, 1967). IWMs are developed and elaborated in the first four years (Thiessen, 1993) and subsequently are relatively stable, guiding interactions and interpretations of social experiences. A securely attached child's IWM will be of a caregiver responsive to their needs and loving towards the child. The child's model of him/herself will be of someone who is deserving of love and care. The converse is true of an insecurely attached child where unloveable representations of the self by others, influence assumptions of future relationships, producing a negative and rejecting feedback loop between the self and others.

Ainsworth's (1982) concept of a 'secure base' is an 'ambience' provided by the attachment figure, that facilitates the attached person to explore and be curious of his/her environment within the perimeter of this ambience (Holmes, 1993). Only when distance is great or the secure base is unreliable does the child's attachment bond become tangible



by attachment behaviour (such as clinginess). Some children have no secure base (a state of 'dissuagement') and resort to sycophantic, attention seeking, controlling or other defensive styles of interacting. Separation protest is the primary response of children when separated from their parents (sometimes even by maltreated children). It is presumed that the very desperate distressed behaviour of a protesting child has the function of restoring proximity to the attachment figure and prevents subsequent separation.

Hetherington et al. (1978, 1979) found the quality of care-giving can change radically due to the distress and added responsibilities of the resident parent. Divorced parents showed less affection and poorer communication with their children and their care-giving was often inconsistent and less structured than before. These changes can be apparent to the child and produce a second threat, the first being the departure of the non-resident parent (Hess and Camera, 1979). Attachment and bonding with the remaining parent may therefore be negatively affected, exacerbating separation anxiety (Kalter and Rembar, 1981).

The child's existing 'attachment style' categorised as 'secure' or 'insecure' can have an impact upon the way children cope with PRB. Insecure attachment styles can be 'avoidant/ambivalent' or 'disorganised' and represent the person's means of coping with rejecting or unreliable care-giving. Avoidant attachment is characterized by the child reducing their needs for the attachment to prevent rejection. Contact is distant and their neediness is distanced also by removal from consciousness ('defensive exclusion'). Ambivalent attachment combines defensive exclusion with clingy, submissive behaviour and frequently a caretaking role. These are not yet sound concepts (Rutter, 1994) but are

a useful means of evaluating 'anxious attachment'.

Attachment theory was originally distinguished from the psychoanalytic schools as Bowlby emphasised the centrality of 'external' experience. However, commentators (e.g. Gomez, 1998) note that attachment theory was essentially the same as object relations theory. Object Relations perspectives will be examined next, focusing on the prolific research of Wallerstein.

### **3.4 Object Relations Perspectives**

Wallerstein (1983/1984) laid the groundwork for future investigations by proposing children had to master six hierarchical psychological tasks to attain long-term stability. Wallerstein's framework is arguably the most coherent interpretation of children's experiences of PRB. This is perhaps due to the longitudinal and expansive nature of Wallerstein and Kelly's (1980) and subsequently Wallerstein's research. These are shown in Table 1:

**Table 1: Wallerstein's Six Tasks**

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Acknowledge the reality of their parents' divorce.</li><li>• Disengage from parental conflict and resume ordinary developmental activities.</li><li>• Resolve their sense of loss.</li><li>• Resolve their anger and self-blame.</li><li>• Accept the permanence of their parents' divorce.</li><li>• Generate realistic expectations about their own future relationships.</li></ul> |
|---|

Wallerstein's view is rooted in the conception that children internalise representations of themselves in relation to each parent and of the parents with each other. Identification with a parent is particularly salient when that parent is rejected by the other parent, as the child may internalise that rejection (Kalter, 1987). Relationship patterns in adulthood

develop out of internal defences against sadness, anger and anxiety due perhaps to object loss in the case of children of PRB.

### **3.5 Risk, Resiliency and PRB**

Hetherington (1999) has extensively reviewed the literature on vulnerability and protective factors. These factors change during life (developmental and situational) and can be identified to understand individual differences of vulnerability and resiliency in coping.

The broader adjustment literature shows mixed findings of emotional turmoil and poor adjustment (e.g. Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976, 1980) and also good adjustment (Kurdek & Siesky, 1980), and greater sensitivity and autonomy (e.g. Weiss, 1979). It appears children's responses to PRB are not easy to understand or predict but rather are complex and interactive. Some literature has highlighted the similarity of PRB with bereavement after death of a parent (Jewett, 1994) implying the child may have similar psychological experiences. However, recent research by Harrington and Harrison (1999) showed lower predicted risk of depression and other mental illness in children following bereavement than in PRB (Rodgers and Pryor, 1998). This suggests that children perceive the loss of a parent due to death differently to the change in relationship with a non-resident parent, due to PRB.

Cockett and Tripp (1994) found adjustment outcomes of children in high conflict 'intact' families more closely resembled children of low conflict intact families than 'reordered' families<sup>4</sup>. Hetherington (1999) also found that PRB has greater impact on adjustment

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<sup>4</sup> 'Intact' refers to families where PRB has not taken place whereas 'reordered' refers to families where PRB has taken place.

than did conflict per se, particularly in boys, but the interaction of PRB and conflict is complex.

Hess and Camera (1979) argue that conflict and lack of collaboration between parents perpetuates a state of 'disequilibrium' and may force a child to withdraw from both parents or to take sides. Either response maintains the child in a distressed and confused state and weakens their bond with their parents. Conflicting loyalties to both parents and sides of the parental families can increase the child's stress. The child can feel burdened with the responsibility of the welfare of one or both parents upon whom (s)he is so dependent. Children may develop a more mature level of sensitivity to and awareness of others' feelings and needs than is appropriate at their stage of development (Emery, 1988).

When examining PRB literature, numerous studies and reviews have highlighted the relationship with the non-resident parent as a significant factor in children's post-PRB adjustment<sup>5</sup> (e.g. Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Hetherington's (1999) review concluded that paternal absence<sup>6</sup> had a significant impact on adjustment irrespective of the child's developmental stage or the time spent living with the parent. Furthermore, the introduction of a stepfather<sup>7</sup> neither helped nor hindered adjustment. "The fact of father absence, in sum, matters much more than the circumstances" (p129).

King (1994) found that the strongest effects of father involvement on child wellbeing were associated with child support (consistent with Hetherington, 1999). King's research

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<sup>5</sup> 'Adjustment' here refers to data showing a change in emotional, social and educational functioning in a positive or negative direction.

<sup>6</sup> Hetherington focused upon fathers as they usually become the NRP.

<sup>7</sup> The more fashionable term 'remarried' father is not used as the researcher felt this was a confusing term.

supported the findings of previous studies that there was no apparent association between child wellbeing and father visitation per se. However, parent-child relationship and possible parental conflict may play a significant role in the process and effects of father visitation (King, 1994).

The relationship quality during contacts and the exclusivity of this time appear the important factors in child adjustment, not the frequency or convenience of contact (Hess and Camera, 1979; Kurdek and Berg, 1983). Hess and Camera measured the relationship quality in terms of the degree of positive and negative emotions characterised in the relationships, the openness of parent-child communication and the quality of child-centred time spent. This quality can limit or enhance the parent's ability to socialise and nurture the child effectively and give the child confidence to feel their bond is separate and protected from the parental conflict, enabling the child to pursue age-appropriate social and academic tasks (Hess and Camera, 1979). This supports Wallerstein's second step (see p8) in adjustment to PRB.

As many as 90% of single-parent households are headed by mothers, suggesting a trend towards fathers disengaging from the family (Richards and Dyson, 1982). Stephen's (1996) study of correlates of post-divorce contact<sup>8</sup> indicated that it is the characteristics of the fathers, not children, mothers or marital relationship that determines contact post-PRB. Therefore, parent characteristics may be of greatest predictive value of post-PRB relationship quality. Hess and Camera (1979) supported this by pointing out that even fathers without rights of residency may still maintain considerable quality contact sufficient to influence their child's life whereas fathers may appear absent even in 'intact'

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<sup>8</sup> Social, marital involvement and socio-economic advantaged parenting.

families.

#### **4. PRB Research Literature Taking the Child's Perspective**

Reviews of research (e.g. Mitchell, 1987) have shown parents, who appear close to their children, are frequently ill-informed about their children's views and feelings. Mitchell's review (1987) remarked on the slow process of educating adults about children's views. Research into children's views began in the US as recently as 1980 by Wallerstein and Kelly. The first British study, based upon interviews with London children of divorced parents, was by Walczak and Burns (1984). The 'children' were in fact aged 6-57! Despite this age range, this study made a valuable contribution built upon by Mitchell (1985). Mitchell interviewed Scottish adolescents whose parents had divorced five years earlier. Mitchell had insisted upon separate interviews for parents and children and their accounts were later compared.

Mitchell (1987) identified common themes arising from the two British studies and there was a high degree of congruence between these and McCredie and Horrox (1985) despite different recruitment strategies.

A large proportion of children had been *unaware of parental antecedent problems* or were unable or unwilling to contemplate the possibility of parental separation. The children reported *lack of information* and needed truthful information and accounts of events to maintain future trust in their parents. Distress was generally due to fears about parental separation rather than parental conflict itself and most children *wanted their parents reconciled*. While most children felt distressed by the separation, many felt *unable to share their feelings* with a parent. Although most parents assumed that their

children felt the same as they did, this was only sometimes the case.

*Residency* had been much less of an issue for children than contact perhaps as most children said no choice was given. Where children had lost *contact*, a subsequent resumption of contact was generally met with feelings of ambivalence and defensive behaviour as the children attempted to manage feelings of rejection. Irregular visits generally left children awkward, bewildered and rejected and, over time, children found the visits generally became less frequent/shorter. Where contact was good, children experienced distress at leaving the parent and wanted their parents reunited<sup>9</sup>.

Children proved extremely sensitive to their parents' feelings and motives. Paradoxically perhaps, the interviews revealed that children had more awareness "of their parents' distress than the other way round" (Mitchell, 1987, p141). The negative effects of poor parental attention to children's emotional wellbeing moved Walczek and Burns (1984) to write: "the importance of the continuity of relationships with both parents cannot be over-emphasised".

Mitchell (1987) stated "all of these comments from children invalidate another myth, that children resent being given an opportunity to discuss their parents' divorce, in case they become more upset. Children need to have their feelings acknowledged and accepted, even if they become distressed" (p141). Both Mitchell (1985) and McCredie and Horrox (1985) reported that some children said they had never talked about their feelings. The most recent British study that addressed children's views, the Exeter Study (Cockett and Tripp, 1994), did so using semi-structured interviews producing researcher-led

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<sup>9</sup> Sadly, overall about two thirds of these children rarely or never saw one parent long-term.

exploration. Clinicians are now exploring children's viewpoints using qualitative methodology in clinical settings. For example, Gorell Barnes and Dowling (1997) investigated the narratives in families going through PRB and noted hierarchies of discourses and their impact on children's experiences and ability to 'have a story'. By having a story they meant the children were able to generate an internal narrative in order to give meaning to events. They observed three patterns. In the first, a child is required to run two parallel stories to fit each conflicting parent producing a "loyalty dilemma" leaving the child to work out which story is to be believed. In the second, the family lacked a story or denied the child the right to a story. In the third, the parent was unable to relinquish control to the other parent, leaving the child with a story of reproach and criticism of the other parent<sup>10</sup>. Part of their clinical focus was therefore on individual children's perspectives whilst taking account also of parental/systemic dilemmas.

## **5. Limitations of Previous Research**

Whilst there is growing international literature about the perceptions, ideas and views of children about their parents' divorce (e.g. van Wamelen, 1990) there are a number of limitations to these studies. The main critique of this literature is by Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1999) who criticised the use of cross-sectional sampling, non-validated measures and failure to investigate mediating factors. Due to insufficient space, these limitations are summarised in Appendix 2. The dearth of methodologically sound, integrative, theory-based research in this field has prevented the implementation of evidence-based practice in clinical settings. Clinical outcome research in this field will next be discussed.

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<sup>10</sup> This is primarily a social constructionist approach arising from family therapy principles.



## **6. Clinical Implications of PRB and of the Current State of Clinical Research**

Children and adults from divorced families are two or three times more likely to receive psychological treatment than non-divorced families (Zill, Morrison and Coiro, 1993). Laumann-Billings and Emery (1998) found much of the treatment given is to manage sub-clinical distress caused by the family disruption. Recent reviews indicate that there is a shortage of systematic controlled research examining intervention outcome with divorced and separated families (e.g. Emery, et al., 1999).

Lee, et al. (1994) bemoan the lack of methodologically sound studies examining the effectiveness of group interventions. Research frequently used poorly validated measures that differed between studies preventing direct comparison. They found group interventions for children produced only modest gains in reducing 'externalising'<sup>11</sup> problems. However, several studies showed decreases in 'internalising' behaviours (e.g. Pedro-Carroll and Cowen, 1985) where the group goals related to skill development and improved functioning, yet findings varied and some studies found no such differences. Modest improvements in internalising behaviour can be interpreted as more significant when taken in a long-term prevention context.

Similarly, parent support and skills group interventions have only produced moderately beneficial effects, generally associated with the alleviation of depressive symptoms and overall distress. Of particular concern was the lack of support for the effectiveness of interventions for single-parenting issues, suggesting that clinical psychology is failing to provide adequate services to enhance post-PRB parenting to improve children's

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<sup>11</sup> Achenbach (1991) used the term 'externalising' to denote external expression of negative feelings through disruptive, aggressive behaviours. 'Internalising' behaviours refer to somatic complaints, depression, anxiety and withdrawal.

adjustment (Emery et al, 1999). Parents and professionals remain uncertain of exactly what to do to improve children's experience of PRB, yet Wolchik, et al. (1993) found parenting competence and the quality of parent-child relationships were the most significant mediating factors in obtaining improvements in child adjustment.

No major studies of individual child interventions were found, as group interventions are generally preferred for resource reasons and an assumption that children feel more comfortable in a small group and receive benefit from the presence of other children (Grych and Fincham, 1992). There have long been calls for greater understanding of children of divorced parents in order to deliver services sensitive to their needs (e.g. Everett, 1989). Cockett and Tripp (1994) reported that children were aware, at the time of PRB of their parents' distress and difficulties and about half their participants would have liked to talk to someone about this. Whilst about half had talked to their resident parents, many had felt these were topics they could not discuss.

## **7. Present Research**

### **7.1 Research Aim**

From a review of the literature, there remains a need to develop a deeper understanding and insight into children's psychological experiences of PRB, in particular into children's emotional and cognitive interpretation of their relationship with their NRP. This is in order to contribute to an integrative theoretical framework to inform parents and clinical practice.

## **7.2 Research Rationale**

The rationale for the present research was to expand the body of knowledge on children's perspectives of PRB and inform parents and practitioners. Hawkins (1994) observed that "one problem that research projects have...is that even with so many children from divorced parents, there is little qualitative research from which to draw information and conclusions" to inform clinical practice.

The aim of the methodology was for it to be 'child-led' and accessible to children, in order to capture what children really want to say, to enhance children's ownership and empowerment in research and to reflect the spirit of enlightened current guidelines for good practice in working with children.

## **7.3 Research Questions**

The research questions were intentionally kept flexible, consistent with the recommendations of Riessman (1993) since "analytic induction, by definition, causes questions to change and new ones to emerge"(p60). The emergent questions are set out below<sup>12</sup>.

- 1. What events do children incorporate into their PRB stories to describe their experiences of PRB?**
- 2. How do the separation events of non-resident parents (NRP) from their children impact upon the children (particularly their sense of self)?**

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<sup>12</sup> The original research questions were changed early in the process as they were based upon the Researcher's narrow assumptions as to the significant events of divorce specifically that were unhelpful in describing the children's accounts of other forms of PRB. The original research questions are in App.3.

## **7.4 Choice of Methodology**

Grounded theory methodology (Strauss, 1987) was integrated with narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993) to best facilitate achievement of the research aim. The author wanted to remove preconceived assumptions of adults to gain a clearer understanding of children's views. Both grounded theory and narrative analysis are 'inductive' approaches whereby theory can be generated from, and thus grounded in, the data. Both approaches assume that the 'data' (the stories), are socially constructed and so intrinsically unstable and predicted to change and evolve as a result of repeated telling as new symbols are identified and ideas explored (Clarke, 1989).

### **7.4.1 Broad Narrative Methodology**

Story telling about past events is one of the first forms of discourse a child learns (Nelson, 1989). It is a universal human activity across the life span and social groups (Riessman, 1993). Story metaphor emphasises that humans create order and construct texts in particular contexts (Riessman, 1993). Narrative analysis acknowledges and appreciates the personal meaning and social conventions influencing children's narrative (Gergen, 1988) providing a useful tool for analysis of stories to study the questions of culture, experience and beliefs (Cortazzi, 1993).

### **7.4.2 Grounded Theory Methodology**

Much discourse in the divorce literature is 'adult discourse', that is, it suggests an 'adult' understanding of the 'truth' about children's experiences of divorce and separation based

upon adult observations and hypotheses. Grounded theory allows open-minded exploration of alternative meanings and discourses in the pursuit of understanding. One reason for using grounded theory is to foster theory generation, upon which subsequent research can be built to close the "embarrassing gap between theory and empirical research" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 p.vii) that could be said to exist in relation to the lack of child-centred approaches.

There are two fundamental analytical commitments guiding the grounded theory methodology, these are *constant comparative method* and *theoretical sampling*, used to generate theory and to develop conceptual and theoretical depth of analysis (Pidgeon, 1996). Other details of methodology and the direction of inquiry are anticipated to change since:

"groundedness...results from the researcher's commitment to analyse what they actually observed in the field or in their data. If they find recurrent themes or issues in the data, then they need to follow up on them, which can and often does, lead grounded theorists in unanticipated directions" (Charmaz, 1990, p1162).

### **7.5 Issues of Researcher *A Priori* Assumptions**

Riessman (1993) argues that a researcher cannot start analysis without a flavour of at least some theoretical resources to guide interpretation of data and representation. As a consequence, the researcher will have substantial *a priori* assumptions that "sensitise" the researcher to theoretical signs in the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). It is the 'flip flop' between ideas and research experience (Bulmer, 1979) that produces emerging concepts and theory. Although commentators vary in their philosophies (see Charmaz,

1990), it is generally accepted that researcher assumptions should be made explicit (for example, using research diaries) and research viewed as a reflexive process.

## **7.6 Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Methods**

A common criticism of qualitative research is that it fails to live up to the rigour and scrutiny that is expected of quantitative research. From the constructivist perspective, the researcher comes to the research with his/her own set of beliefs, values and experiences that cannot be separated from the phenomena being observed and so from the research process. By implication, the same information could be plausibly interpreted differently by different individuals whose constructions may conflict (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). The criteria of reliability and validity are therefore arguably unsuitable safeguards of research rigour. Instead, qualitative research may be judged using the criteria of “trustworthiness” and “authenticity” of the extent to which different ideas emerge and are represented in the enquiry process (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Riessman, 1993). The main criteria for qualitative research using narrative analysis (Riessman (1993) and grounded theory (Quinn Patton, 1990) are described below.

*‘Persuasiveness’* (Riessman, 1993) or *‘Rhetorical Power’* (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995) is a measure of how convincing the interpretation might be. It is most powerful when interpretations and theoretical claims are supported by data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), compared with rival explanations (Quinn Patton, 1990), and are presented in a way that is understandable to the intended audience.

*‘Correspondence’* (Riessman, 1993) resembles respondent validation. Riessman questions the ability for a researcher’s interpretations to be affirmed in this way as

“stories are not static, meanings of experiences shift as consciousness changes”(p66). There are more specific arguments against feeding back findings to children such as the appropriateness of sharing observations and insights without the facility to allow the children to talk through the implications of such insights (see Appendix 4).

*'Auditability'* (Sandelowski, 1986) and *'Analytic Accountability'* (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995) both enable the scrutiny of the entire research process. A purist constructivist researcher may doubt the value of this means of assessing the trustworthiness as each enquirer would be assumed to have different constructions (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Sufficient data should be presented at all stages of analysis to enable the reader to see how an idea emerged from the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

*'Coherence'* Riessman (1993) talks of tests of whether global coherence (the overall goals or messages of the participant) fit the local coherence or themal coherence. This constrains “ad hoc” theorising (Riessman, 1993) about a particular narrative. Grounded theory benefits from creating coherence through searching for negative cases and for alternative explanations within and between data and by triangulation of data sources (Quinn Patton, 1990).

*'Transferability'*, a constructivist approach replaces generalisability with transferability of findings to the wider population, the process of checking the degree of similarity in terms of temporal, situational and cultural factors to decide how transferable the findings might be (Guba and Lincoln, 1989).

*'Generativity'* (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995) This considers whether the research facilitates further research questions.

## **PART II      METHOD**

### **8.      Design**

The design was a phenomenological qualitative study using narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993) and grounded theory methodology (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Data were gathered by 'child-led' interviews facilitated by a semi-structured interview schedule designed and followed by the author (Appendix 5). Parent participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule to obtain their outline of PRB and information about contact and residency arrangements.

Standardized questionnaires were administered to child and parent participants to obtain a description of parents' perceptions of their children's behaviour problems, if any, and the children's own feelings of self-esteem. It was envisaged that the questionnaire information would provide some validation for emerging qualitative themes from the children indicating their adjustment to the PRB or its impacts, that is, to act as a form of 'triangulation' (see section 12.3).

### **9.      Participants**

Participants were recruited on a volunteer basis. Participants comprised 27 child participants (including two pilot participants), 15 male and 12 female, and 21 parent participants, three fathers and 18 mothers (as six pairs of children were biological siblings). Child and parent pairs of participants were sought. All parent participants were biological parents who had divorced or separated (married or unmarried) from the other biological parent with whom they and the child (aged 8 to 12 years inclusive) had been living. Parent participants retained in the sample had sole or joint rights of residency agreed on a formal or informal basis.



## **9.1 Sampling**

Theoretical sampling was used, that is sampling on “the basis of concepts that have proven theoretical relevance to an evolving theory” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p176). The initial sample was kept broad to include children of different ages, gender, and geographical area. For some children, a parent left when they were infants, for others, when they were older. Parent participants included fathers and mothers, parents who had been unmarried prior to PRB, were awaiting divorce or were remarried. They were from various socio-economic backgrounds.

### ***Inclusion Criteria***

The criterion that the NRP had lived apart from the child for more than one year was included to minimize the risk of interviewing children and parents in acute distress. The minimum age of child participants of eight was decided on the basis of research suggesting that the cognitive and emotional capacities of younger children are qualitatively different (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980). The maximum age included children up to and including 12 years, as the capacities and experiences of adolescents are significantly different from the younger age group. In light of Levitin’s (1979) observation: “since the children who are in therapy are apt to be the most distressed of children, the clinical literature on children of divorce describes the most extreme and pathological patterns of response”. The author considered it vital to recruit participants from non-clinical sources to reduce such a biasing effect and to minimise the effect of therapeutic interventions on the generation of narratives. The complete inclusion criteria for initial sampling are presented in Appendix 6.

## **9.2 Recruitment of Participants**

Based upon the high recruitment rate of Cockett and Tripp (1994), the author anticipated a high response rate with only slight reservations from parents in allowing their children to take part. The author had markedly different experiences of recruitment, finding great difficulty recruiting participants. Due to this difficulty, three waves of recruitment were undertaken. Proceeding with the study was subject to Ethics Committee approval at each wave. Letters of approval for each wave are shown in Appendix 7.

### ***Wave One***

#### ***Via Schools***

Recruitment was initially through publicity in school newsletters and posters in schools. Permission was granted by two education authorities (Appendix 8). Where school head teachers agreed by telephone to participate or sought further information, an information pack was sent containing a covering letter, a suggested wording for a parents' newsletter notice (Appendix 9), laminated posters, information sheets and pre-paid envelopes. Posters (Appendix 10) were for display on parents' notice boards in schools. It was requested that Information Sheets (Appendix 11) be readily available near the posters for parents, and for children to take home for parents. Parents were asked on the Information Sheet to return a reply slip in the prepaid envelopes provided or telephone the author if their family fitted the requirements for participation and would consider taking part.

#### ***Via Solicitors***

A solicitors' firm agreed to forward the Information Sheet (Approved by the firm and Ethics Committee) to (ex-) clients meeting the requirements for participation together with a letter from the firm on the author's behalf to potential participants (Appendix 12).

To maintain personal and professional confidentiality, potential participants were sought indirectly through the solicitors via the Information Sheet.

Both of these methods proved ineffective producing only one participant and so the second wave was instigated following ethical committee approval.

### ***Wave Two***

Wave two comprised advertising in local newspapers (Appendix 13) and by posters and information sheets displayed in public places such as libraries, post offices, community centres and shoppers' notice boards. The continued lack of response (with only one participant coming forward two months later) led to a further wave.

### ***Wave Three***

The third and final wave was through processes of networking and then 'snowballing' (Barker, Pistrang and Elliott, 1994). Acquaintances with specific links with public services were approached and given information packs. These contacts were asked to publicise the research and make the information available in their service for parents to see. (Contacts included Gingerbread, church and youth group leaders).

### ***Widening of Criteria for Sampling***

Due to the poor initial response and insufficient time to wait for participants to volunteer who fitted the tight inclusion criteria, the criteria were also relaxed (following ethical committee and Salomons' course approval). These amendments to the criteria are set out

in Appendix 6. They allowed inclusion of separated as well as divorced parents, and separated parents who were unmarried.

### ***Means of Arranging Interviews***

All parents who responded were telephoned (at their request) to discuss matters further. In most instances, parents then preferred to arrange an appointment immediately. A letter, enclosing a letter to the child, was then sent confirming the appointment and giving further details (Appendix 14). It was anticipated that parents would wish to be interviewed at their home and so this was suggested as the first option for venue. To avoid inappropriate interference or influence, possible participants were excluded at this stage where legal family proceedings were in progress or threatened. Parents were reminded that the author would interview each child and parent separately, so as to reduce the likelihood of a biased story based upon the parents' narrative.

## **10. Measures and Materials**

### ***Interview Schedule and Framework (Appendix 5)***

The Interview Schedule and Framework comprised:

- An introduction to the study - parent and child together
- An interview with the parent alone - to obtain background information about the PRB and to answer the parent's questions (meanwhile the child was occupied drawing family pictures)
- An interview with the child alone (agreed by parent and child) – to elicit their story or stories of divorce/parental separation and their relationship with the NRP.
- Completion of a questionnaire - with the author (while the parent completed questionnaire alone)
- Final debriefings 1) with the child and 2) with parent and child together.

The standardised questionnaires used to obtain data on the child's psychosocial adjustment (that is, self-esteem, self-concept and emotional and behavioural adjustment) are described below:

### ***Child Behaviour Checklist and Revised Child Behaviour Profile (CBCL)***

(Achenbach and Edelbrock, 1983; Achenbach, 1991)

The CBCL is a measure that is widely used both clinically and for research purposes. This parental checklist has norms for boys and girls, aged 4 to 16 and profiles of social competence and behaviour problems (both internalised and externalised). The major limitation of the CBCL was its requirement of good parent literacy skills for self-administration. This was not a problem for the parent participants here.

The examination of both internalising and externalising behaviour problems is important as previous research has shown that the latter is particularly common following divorce, especially in boys (Emery, 1982). Amato and Rezac (1994) suggested that studies should include a measure of internalising problems as these are frequently overlooked.

Test-retest reliability of item scores was very high ( $p < .001$ ), and the competence and problem scales achieved a mean test-retest of  $r = .87$  and  $r = .89$  respectively. For (non-PRB) parents, agreement levels on their independent ratings were found to be high. The CBCL has good content, criterion and construct validity (Achenbach, 1991).

### ***Culture-Free Self Esteem Inventories - Second Edition (CFSEI-2, Form B)***

(Battle, 1992)

The CFSEI-2 Form B is a 30-item questionnaire comprising general, social/peer-related, academic and parental/home-related self esteem subtests (Appendix 15) plus a lie subtest which indicates 'defensiveness' or social desirability responding (Battle, 1990). Whilst the CFSEI-2 is widely used clinically in the UK, it has only US norms limited to

elementary school age children (8 to 11 years) although the classification of scores included junior high age children (11 years – 13 years).

Content validity was good (Battle, 1990). Self esteem scores of the CFSEI-2 indicated a high inverse correlation with depression and anxiety scores from well-respected mood measures, suggesting that low self esteem is associated with higher levels of depression and anxiety. The validation research is mainly from the US and so provides only tentative information for this study. The CFSEI-2 overall “have been found to be effective measures of affective mood states” (Battle, 1992, p5) and so could provide a general measure of emotional well-being.

The author decided to administer the CFSEI-2 orally (an option included in the administration guidelines) and was prepared to clarify questions as required. The function of the questionnaire in this research design was to describe the sample and to provide some corroboration from inferences made from individual story analysis (triangulation).

## **11. Procedure**

### **11.1 Piloting the Research**

Prior to participant recruitment, the interview schedule and questionnaires were piloted on a child psychologist who role-played the entire process (parent and child interviews). The parent interview was also performed with two non-participant parents (a divorced mother and father). In addition, the author consulted with three clinical psychologists and a youth counsellor regarding the appropriateness of the wording of prompts for the children’s interview.

A number of changes were made to the Interview Schedule in the light of the initial pilot interviews and other consultation. Wording was changed to reflect the children's stages of development. The questionnaires were modified. The Family Environment Scale (Moos, 1974) and Family Environment Scale – Children's Version (Pino, Simons and Slawinowski, 1984) were removed as they were considered too culture-specific and did not reflect sufficiently the variation in family structures. It was anticipated that showing pictures of a two parent "happy family" may possibly highlight the contrast with the children's own experiences of family life and cause unnecessary distress. In addition, the substantial length of questionnaires would have made the task too onerous for the participants. To reduce the length of questionnaires further, the Self Esteem Index (Brown and Alexander, 1990) was exchanged for the CFSEI-2 which was a much shorter questionnaire incorporating similar domains.

Subsequent piloting was carried out using the first two participants recruited, and changes were made to the interview process in terms of the management of parent distress through introducing greater structure to the *Parent Interview Schedule* and greater attention to the issue of available time. Comments were sought from the parents and children of the pilots as to how the process could be improved. The only comment arose from the first interview that it had not been made clear enough at the outset that the parent would not have access to the child's interview material. Greater care was taken with subsequent participants to ensure that parents were clear about this issue.

## **11.2 Interview Procedure**

At the start of the interview, the author began with exchanging names, introducing the nature and structure of the research and answering any initial questions to put participants at their ease following the format of the Interview Schedule.

### ***Parent Interview***

The parent interview encouraged parents to describe briefly the events of their PRB and subsequently. Parents were encouraged to focus on the experiences for their children, rather than providing detailed accounts of their own feelings and experiences. Many parents needed repeated reminders of this as they wished to use the interview to discuss their own feelings. The parent was then asked to complete the CBCL whilst their child was being interviewed.

### ***Child Interview***

The child interview started with discussion of the family picture. On the rare occasions when the children had not drawn a family picture, they were asked:

1. Questions about any drawing they *did* produce, to put the child at ease and acknowledge their achievement;
2. Who would have appeared in their family drawing had they drawn one; and
3. Where would they have positioned family members on the paper (for example, saying “Who would be near to mummy”).

The author asked each child participant where *their* story was to begin, having first made sure the child understood issues of confidentiality and the interview structure (explained earlier). The interview schedule was used more flexibly with the children, to fit their



circumstances. For example, some children knew exactly where they wanted to start whilst others wanted help as to where to begin their story. The interview process was child-led, although breaks were offered. Child participants were encouraged to tell their story without the author prompting, where possible. The author only resorted to 'question and answer discourse' if:

1. The child appeared to be floundering and becoming anxious about what to say.
2. The child was unable to initiate the telling of their story due to their level of maturity, personal characteristics, lack of interest or distractibility.
3. The child provided a very superficial story that felt 'over in two minutes' (where their maturity suggested they would be able to expand on meanings).
4. The child mentioned an experience, event or word that needed further clarification for the author to understand the meaning.

The author returned to the child-led position whenever possible but did not always achieve this position. The children's stories generally ended naturally within the maximum time limit, at which point, the author introduced the mood measure. Where the child participant wanted more time, the author gave several warnings that it was nearly time to stop and discussed with the child in the debriefing their options for further support and time to talk through their feelings. The CFSEI-2 was administered orally after the child interview and before inviting the RP into the room for joint debriefing.

### **11.3 Ethical Issues**

#### ***Consent and Confidentiality***

Written consent from the parent was obtained subject to conditions (Appendix 16) and within the BPS Code of Practice of Professional Conduct. The child was asked to give verbal consent to interviewing and for the interview to be recorded. It was made clear to both parent and child participants that:

- 1) The information collected in the child's interview would not be passed on to the parent as a matter of course. Information about the content of the child's interview would only be passed to the parent a) with the child's consent and/or b) if the interviewer became concerned about the child's wellbeing.
- 2) Anonymity of participants would be maintained by the removal of names, places and pieces of narrative that contained details that might identify participants.

#### ***Managing Parent Distress and Parent Debriefing***

Occasionally parents became distressed during the parent interview. Time was spent debriefing parents before the children returned into the room. Debriefing included discussing available support including, if appropriate, clinical or voluntary services available.

#### ***Managing Child Distress and Child Debriefing***

Where child participants became openly distressed, the author gave the child a clear choice whether to continue or stop the interview. At the end of the interview stage the child participant was given a mood measure consisting of three line drawings of faces on

a single piece of A4 card based upon Lay, Waters and Park (1989). One face had a big smile, the centre face had a neutral expression and the third face looked sad. Underneath, a Likert scale from 1 to 10 followed the faces and was used for the older children. Each child participant was asked to say how they felt now (at the end of the interview) and before the interview started. The author distinguished feelings of anxiety from happy/sad feelings.

The aims of the child debriefing were as follows:

1. To establish how the child was feeling after, compared to before, the interview.
2. To identify ways the child could manage any negative feelings (sadness or anxiety) that had emerged during the interview process.
3. To identify ways in which others could provide any additional support needed (from parents or child services).
4. To think of any questions the child may want answered and consider who would be best placed to answer them.
5. To agree what information the child felt happy to be passed on to the parent by way of feedback following the interview.

### ***Joint Debriefing***

The aims of the joint debriefing were:

1. To provide a forum for any information the child wished to pass on to the parent while the author was present.
2. To enable the author to provide the parent with some feedback about their child's reaction to telling the story, in order to enable the parent to support the child.

3. To enable the author to answer any questions and supply the participants with any additional information about the research process and the provision of local support services.
4. To say good-bye.

In all cases, the parent participants appeared to have predicted quite accurately the impact of the interview on their child and so required only confirmation of their expectations. Offers of information about counselling services for children were mentioned as issues arose in the parent and child interviews and the author provided details of counselling services local to each family as agreed. A 'thank you' card was also sent to the children. All participants were informed of the availability, in late summer, of research summaries and copies of these were offered to participants.

### ***Subsequent Debriefing***

The author told all the families that they could contact the author by telephone if they had any additional questions or concerns. One parent did contact the author, concerned that her child was exhibiting behaviour problems since the interview. The author discussed at length the options for further help through local services and (following discussion with the research supervisor and Salomons' staff) offered a further debriefing session that was not taken up by the parent as the child's behaviour improved within a few days.

## **12. Analysis of Data**

Data analysis comprised two main methods, first, narrative analysis to systematically structure the data and then grounded theory using that structured data.

### **12.1 Theoretical Sampling and Transcription Processes**

The process of initial sampling had to be pragmatic as participants were slow to recruit and then came all at once. The author interviewed all potential participants who met the initial sampling criteria. However, seven participants were subsequently excluded from the detailed analysis on the following grounds:

1. Multiple remarriages by the resident parent and previous interviewing for a television programme (two sibling male participants).
2. Residency arrangements were shared equally rather than one parent being resident and one non-resident. The children were at boarding school (two sibling male participants).
3. Behaviour problems arising after the interview hypothesised to have arisen through concerns of the child that the non-resident parent did not approve of the research. There had been a history of domestic violence in this family. The child was excluded on the assumption that she wished to withdraw (one female participant).
4. Child had recently become a 'clinical' case and had seen a psychologist on one occasion (one female participant).
5. Child's age had been only seven as a birthday was coming up shortly (one female participant - sibling of participant 'Rebecca').

From the 25 participants interviewed (excluding two pilot interviews) when these seven were removed from the analysis, 18 participants remained. These differed in age, gender, circumstances and questionnaire scores. Analysis was left until after interviewing in

order to ensure that the time delay from recruitment to interview was kept to a minimum. All interviews were fully transcribed.

## **12.2 Narrative Analysis**

### ***Defining of Process***

Narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993) was the starting point to reduce the text down to the elements that told the child's story. There is no prescribed means of analysis as it is determined by the features in the data suggesting a direction or focus of analysis (features "jump out", Riessman, 1993). The italicised terms referred to below are defined in the glossary in Appendix 17. In order to decide this focus, a number of decisions were made.

The nature of a '*story*' was left undefined for the purposes of the study (Bell, 1988). No definition was given to children or suggested as it was such a common and well-understood word, except to say that it was not restrictive in its incorporation of fiction and fantasy. The author wanted to use the everyday meaning of a story to enable the participants and other children to understand immediately the purpose and structure required (Riessman, 1993) but some were not sure how to start.

Many of the children's interviews comprised a mixture of '*narratives*' and '*question and answer discourses*' (Q&A). These are terms that the author used to distinguish the aspects of the story as a whole that arose from the child ('*narratives*') from those that were directed by the author (Q&A), in order to clarify the child's interest or meaning in the story.

The narrative could be triggered by the child ('child-triggered') spontaneously or arose out of a comment or question of the author ('researcher triggered') that the child 'picked up on and ran with'. In the latter situation, the narrative was only described as such if it clearly went beyond just answering the author's question and involves the child investing a meaning in the discourse beyond just giving an answer. When in doubt, the author assumed the discourse was Q&A although in reality the distinction was usually evident. A 'narrative' could be punctuated by questions from the author but these were only included in the narrative structure if they did not interfere with the child's train of thought but merely encouraged elaboration of it.

The author had to decide on the structure of narrative analysis ensuring the process was both rigorous and systematic, and reduced and clarified the data. Labov (1972, 1982) suggested story structure was taken as a starting point for organising the narratives once identified from the text. Labov's structure comprised an Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Resolution/Coda and Evaluation. These elements were customised to accommodate the slightly different nature of children's narratives that often lacked for example, orientation or evaluation, particularly in younger children. Descriptions of these narrative analytic categories are presented in Appendix 17.

### ***Application of Narrative Analysis***

The distinguishing of 'narrative', 'Q&A' and 'other discourse' was carried out by reading and re-reading the transcripts to separate out the different forms gradually, and they were then sorted and edited. This was *always* carried out holistically<sup>13</sup> as the

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<sup>13</sup> 'Holistically' refers to the process of comparing each narrative before and after analytic editing with the overall meanings emerging from the story.

significance of text often did not become apparent until the end of the interview. All 'other discourses' were systematically edited out leaving only 'narratives' and 'Q&A'.

Once the initial sorting was performed, the original transcripts and analysed stories were read together in order to ensure meaning and contextual cues were maintained in the body of the document. Individual 'narratives' and 'Q&A' segments were edited down to their apparent core meaning, taking the most obvious meaning first and retaining information where the meaning was less apparent (Riessman, 1993). The edited analysis document and original transcript were given consistent line-by-line numbering to enable cross-referencing. For each 'narrative' and 'Q&A', a quotation was used as a 'title' to best represent the essential meaning or theme emerging from the text (for the child *not* the researcher i.e. not a theoretical meaning but a message the child is presenting to the listener). The titles were also summarised in order and considered as a whole to examine their global coherence (that is, their overall representativeness of the message in the story). A sample of original and analysed transcript are presented in Appendix 18.

### ***Identification of Key Events***

The key events in the children's stories ('narratives') of PRB were then extracted from the 'complicating action' (Labov, 1972, 1982) of the narrative analysis. These were compared (using extracts from the text) and organised into themes that were representative of the events. A sample of events was presented to a second rater for sorting and identification into themes and the agreement between the two raters was measured using Cohen Kappa's coefficient.



### **12.3 Grounded Theory Analysis**

Using the emerging themes, the hypotheses of the author led to theoretical sampling of the data by repeated reading of the original and narrative analysed transcripts. The author chose which participants to analyse on the basis of hypothetical and theoretical leads where concepts appeared to be emerging. Negative case analysis was used to deepen and widen the theoretical understanding. Eventually, all participants were compared and contrasted for each emerging theme. This grounded theory framework was based upon Smith (1995) and led to the development of a tentative model of the child's adjustment to PRB.

#### ***Data and Theory Triangulation Procedures***

The following additional data were used systematically as a means of validation of information and participants' meaning and author's emerging concepts:

1. Family drawings (see below for details of analysis).
2. Parent Reports (from parent interviews and the qualitative comments given in the CBCL).
3. Competence and Problem Scales from the CBCL.
4. Total scores and categorisation for CFSEI-2 – but used with caution.
5. Process Notes.

#### ***Uses of CBCL and CFSEI-2 Data***

The CBCL profiles were used for two purposes. First, for triangulation, for example, confirming hypotheses that a child is experiencing distress due to the PRB, by showing withdrawn or angry, aggressive behaviour. Secondly, the scale scores provided a description of the sample, for example, by determining whether a child participant has

behaviour/emotional problems that could place them in the 'clinical' range. The CFSEI-2 was originally intended to be used for similar purposes, however, the total scores and categorisations appeared to show a ceiling effect, making them unsuitable for interpretation and so were only used with caution.

### ***Analysis of Family Drawings***

For the purpose of this study, the analysis of pictures was strictly to clarify the meanings of oral discourse and provide context when considered with other data. No interpretation was based upon drawings alone. Analysis of the family drawings was limited to observing the presence or omission of family members from the drawing, the relative size and positioning of figures relative to one another (DiLeo, 1970; Shearn and Russel, 1976), differences and similarities of figures (Spigelman, Spigelman and Engleson, 1992).

### ***Research Diary***

Throughout the research process, the author attempted to elucidate personal assumptions, experiences, priorities and values in the research diary (Appendix 19).

## **PART III RESULTS**

### **Overview of Part III Sections:**

- 13.** Descriptions of participants to introduce the reader to the families referred to in Sections 14 and 15.
- 14.** Research Question 1 - Summary of main event themes to orientate the reader to the events the children used to describe their PRB experiences.
- 15.** Research Question 2 - Selected fine-grained analysis of events and experiences including example quotations.

### **13. Description of Participants**

Table 2 summarises the personal details and other relevant information about each of the children<sup>14</sup> identified in family groups. The 'baby group' are shown first and represent those children too young at the time of PRB to recall the PRB or pre-PRB life. The children are ranked in order of the RP's perception of their adjustment, based upon their reports of current behaviour problems and CBCL scores<sup>15</sup>. Agreement between two independent raters (author and another) on these orderings was high: Spearman's rho = 0.998 (n = 18, p = 0.01). The purpose of this rating was to help to give a sense of the variation in circumstances in the sample, rather than as a current condition to which prior conditions might be seen as contributing.

The table shows that for both groups, the circumstances of PRB and subsequent contact arrangements varied widely. All children had some level of contact but for many, contact was declining or limited to irregular visits.

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<sup>14</sup> For Part III, child participants shall be referred to as 'the children' or by individual's names and their parents as 'mum' and 'dad'. Resident parents will be abbreviated to RP and non-resident parents to NRP.

<sup>15</sup> The categories for ranking the children's behaviour problems are presented in Appendix 20.

**Table 2: The participants, including behaviour problem rating based on resident parent's description of any problems: Rated from 1= none to 7=severe**

Resid. parent	Child/ Age now	Age1 <sup>st</sup> sep'n	Breakdown circumstances from Resident Parent	CBCL	Behav Rating	Contact with NRP
<b>'Baby group' *: Sibling in the 'older group'</b>						
Mother Divorced	Harvey 9	12m	Amicable divorce.	Non-Clinical	1	Regular – joint care.
Mother Divorced	Samanth 12	18m	Father had affair, Mother gave ultimatum, he left.	Non-Clinical	1	Regular – child visits weekends.
Mother Divorced	Evan 8 (Tim)*	18m	Mother divorced Father for unreasonable behaviour.	Non-Clinical	2	At times irregular as father drinks.
Mother Divorced	Joss 12	2y 6m	Mother ended marriage – partly due to being lesbian	Non-Clinical	3	Flexible, frequent, father close by.
Mother Divorced	Brad 8	10m	Mother post-natal depression, Father became violent and had affair. Both moved.	Borderline on Intern'ng behav, Social	7	Some dispute, father refused visits recently.
<b>'Older group' **: Sibling in the 'baby group'</b>						
Mother Separated	Rebecca 9	7	Father had affair. Mother tried to save marriage. Father came and went, then went.	Non-Clinical	1	Regular
Mother Divorced	Claire 8 Cath 10	5 7	Mother post-natal depression. Divorced Father unreasonable behav.	Non-Clinical Clinical: school compet. (dyslex)	1 7	Weekly but father misses without warning.
Mother Divorced	Seb 10 Malc 12	5 8	Mother told Father to leave when he had affair.	Non-Clinical Non-Clinical	2 4	Very infrequent despite living close.
Mother Divorced	Jack 8	7	Mother asked Father to leave when he had affair.	Non-Clinical	3	Regular, frequent and flexible.
Mother Divorced	Zena 8	5	Mother and child moved out when Father violent.	Non-Clinical	5	Irreg. Father's now told children he won't see again.
Mother Divorced	Rosie 9	5	Mother hospitalised – nervous brkdown, then divorced Father for unreasonable behaviour. Custody battle, Father lost.	Non-Clinical	6	Every weekend.
Mother Separated	Headley 9	7	Both new partners before separation.	Non-Clinical	6	Weekends, father's convenience.
Father Divorced	Davy 10	7	Mother had post-natal depression and resented child. Father got custody.	Borderline on School competence	6	Infrequent. Contact declining.
Mother Divorced	Tim 11 (Evan)**	4	Mother divorced Father unreasonable behaviour, not violent.	Borderline: activ's, Clinical: withdrawn	7	At times irregular as father drinks.
Mother Not married	Maddie 10	8	Work kept parents apart – tried counselling then agreed separation.	Borderline: somat, anx/depr Clinical: social	7	Irregular depending on father's work.
Mother Not married	Mike 10	6	Father very violent to whole family. Mother and child to refuge then council house.	Borderline: ext behav, Clinical otherwise.	7	Unsafe for children to see father alone due to his violence.

The mother was the RP and the father was the NRP in all cases except one (Davy) who lived with his father. Some sibling pairs received very different adjustment ratings. For example, Evan ('baby group') had a low (few or no problems) rating but his older brother, Tim, had a high rating. A similar pattern is seen for Claire and Cathy. In two cases where chronic violence of the NRP was mentioned by the RP, the child reportedly had current behaviour problems: Brad ('baby group') and Mike. Other children had behaviour problems where violence was reported to have occurred only once: Tim, or not occurred at all: Maddie. There was some tendency for more regular and undisputed contact to be associated with better adjustment (for instance, Harvey and Samantha ('baby group') and Rebecca), but this was not a perfect rule: Sebastian and Claire had irregular contact but no significant behaviour problems were reported.

In the next section, the events the children associated with the PRB are described. Current adjustment as such is not discussed however, since it was the child's experience during the phases of PRB, and not simply their later adjustment, that was of interest.

#### **14. Research Question 1:**

##### **What events do children incorporate into their PRB story to describe their experiences of PRB?**

Table 3 presents the main events described in the children's stories summarised as event themes. The event themes are grouped into broad themes which have been ordered chronologically (where possible) commencing with impressions of family life before (and hopes for the future), pre-separation experiences such as involvement in

**Table 3. Events themes from children's stories and broader emerging themes**

<b>Broad Theme &amp; No. of Participants</b>	<b>Events Themes</b>	<b>Participants: 'baby group' shown in italics/green</b>
<i>Representations of family life</i> (8)	Former family life (family life: both parents being with the child, for the child)	<i>Bradley, Rebecca, Claire, Cathy, Headley, Maddie,</i>
	Alternative current family life	<i>Samantha, Joss, Bradley Maddie</i>
	Future, hypothetical family life	<i>Joss, Maddie</i>
<i>Representations of NRP</i> (6)	Recall of positive events with NRP	Claire, Sebast'n, Malc, Zena, Mike
	Recall of ambivalent/negative events with NRP	Sebaston, Malc
	Recall of negative events with NRP and others	Sebaston, Zena, Davy, Mike, Malc
<i>Unwilling involvement in parental relationship prior to separation</i> (10)	"Being a doll in the middle": parents discussing future	Rebecca
	Overhears dad tell babysitter (future wife) she's pretty	Headley
	Parental disharmony/ arguments observed/heard	Rebecca, Claire, Cathy, Sebaston, Zena, Maddie, Mike
	Unclear / possible parental conflict observed/heard	Davy, Maddie
	Fantasy re: parental conflict	Jack, Davy,
	Children's intervention in parental conflict	Rebecca, Zena,
	Forcing child to choose between parents	Cathy, Davy
<i>Threat of separation</i> (7)	Parent fighting and RP telling NRP to leave	Rebecca, Sebaston, Jack
	Parents informing child of separation	Cathy, Mad'e, Headl'y, Reb, Malc
<i>Events of acute separation</i> (14)	NRP deciding to leave the RP/family	Cathy, Sebaston, Rebecca
	Parent gone/suddenly not there	Cathy, Sebaston, Malc
	Child's response to separation	Malcolm, Jack, Claire
	NRP moving out of home	Joss, Zena, Headley, Rebecca, Maddie, Cathy, Davy
	Not remembered when parents separated	<i>Samantha, Joss, Bradley, Rosie</i>
<i>Orientation in NRP new life</i> (6)	First visit to NRP's new home	<i>Harvey, Rebecca, Mike</i>
	Difficulties with new partner	Rebecca, Headley, Mike
	Events of new partnership (remarriage, pregnancy)	<i>Samantha, Rosie</i>
<i>Events distancing NRP</i> (8)	Deciding with whom the child shall live	<i>Bradley, Cathy, Tim,</i>
	Child moving houses	<i>Samantha, Bradley, Zena</i>
	Managing greeting and leaving (transitions)	<i>Samantha, Maddie,</i>
	Travelling to and fro	<i>Harvey, Samantha, Headley,</i>
<i>Presence in NRP's new life</i> (9)	Not being able to see enough of NRP	Malcolm, Jack, Zena, Davy
	Being/not being with NRP on special occasions	<i>Harvey, Bradley, Sebaston</i>
	NRP staying local or moving away	<i>Bradley, Headley, Maddie</i>
<i>Importance of child to NRP</i> (8)	Evidence of love /wanting child from NRP	Cathy, Sebaston, Davy
	Signs of child not being a priority to NRP	Malcolm, Davy, Maddie, Mike, Headley, Rebecca
	Responding to risk of being forgotten by NRP	Maddie
<i>Absence of a parent in child's life</i> (5)	Physical changes to home and to life	Maddie
	Absence of a parent on child's experience	Zena, Rosie, Maddie,
	Decisions about following NRP's past advice	Malcolm
	Asking about NRP (& RP) welfare in child's absence	Headley, Maddie, (Maddie)
<i>Events about communication</i> (8)	Parent to child – polarising parents' communication	Rebecca, Cathy
	NRP and/or RP's explanations about PRB events	<i>Joss, Rebecca, Malc, Zena, Maddie</i>
	Difficulties in child communication with NRP (both)	<i>Sam, Reb, (Cathy, Headl'y, Mad'e)</i>
	Sibling discussions	Cathy, Maddie
<i>Ongoing conflict</i> (6)	Being told off unnecessarily by NRP	Rebecca, (Malc pre-PRB), Headley
	Child amidst conflict between parents	Cathy, Jack, Zena, Headley
	Conflict between NRP and child	Rebecca, Headley
<i>Wider social context</i> (7)	Extended family taking sides	Davy, Claire
	Peers "support"	<i>Samantha, Rebecca, Zena</i>
	Peers asking about PRB	<i>Samantha, Claire, Maddie</i>
	Peer discussion highlights PRB/non-PRB differences	<i>Jocelyn, Davy, Maddie</i>

parental conflict and up to post separation events such as ongoing communication difficulties. Finally, a wider social context theme is presented non-chronologically.

Cohen Kappa's coefficient was used to measure inter-rater reliability of categorising event themes into the broad themes indicating inter-rater reliability was 0.86.

Quotes illustrating each of the themes in this table are shown in Appendix 21. These event themes have not been illustrated in detail here, in order that greater space could be given to the meanings of the events to the children, in section 15 that follows. The broad event themes were used as a starting point for further analysis in section 15, which deals with 'meanings'. As will become clear, these meanings were heterogeneous, and went beyond or cut across the broad event themes. At appropriate points, however, links will be made between categories described in section 15 and the event themes briefly discussed here.

As table 3 shows, under the theme of representation of family life, the 'baby group' described only alternative current and hypothetical family life with the exception of Bradley (who referred to early family videos). The 'older group', who had more memories of pre-PRB family life, tended to describe the past. Similarly, the 'baby group' did not mention past memories of the child – NRP relationship whereas the 'older group' described a mixture of positive and negative/ambivalent memories. One of the children with the most difficult pre-PRB and PRB circumstances, as described by the RP, who reported violence by the father and the need to flee to a refuge (Mike), remembered both positive and negative events with the NRP.

A high proportion of the 'older group' (10 out of 13) described unwilling involvement in the parental relationship before PRB. There was evidence that all these experiences were viewed as difficult by the children. Ten of the 'older group' described events associated with the threat of or actual separation. Only one (Joss) of the 'baby group', remembered her NRP moving out. Rosie of the 'older group' did not remember the separation perhaps due to her mother also being hospitalised, confusing her experience of PRB.

Many of the events concerned the NRP, for example, in relation to the NRP's life with a new partner. This was particularly the case in relation to the child's ongoing presence in the NRP's life (9 children across both groups) and difficulties in communication between the child and their NRP.

Three themes in relation to post-PRB life were seen only in the stories of the 'older group': Importance of the child to the NRP, Absence of a parent in the child's life, and Ongoing conflict. This appeared to reflect the absence of contrast with pre-PRB life for the 'baby group' and perhaps the fact that all of the 'older group' continued to be in unsettled circumstances.

The next section presents responses to research question 2. The section will commence with closer examination of the events leading up to and including separation (of the child from the NRP), as this was the phase most referred to by the children and maintains the chronology of PRB. The revised research question will culminate in a proposed model, which will be presented and discussed in Part IV.



## **15. Research Question 2:**

**How do the separation events of the NRP from the child impact on the child (particularly his/her sense of self)?**

### **Theme: 'Shattering Assumptions of Permanency'**

**The undermining of the assumption that, even in conflict or where there are differing views, the family is fundamentally tolerant and accepting within familiar boundaries, thus the parents would not abandon or reject one another or the child. Representations of 'family life' and 'the self in relation to each parent' as relatively secure and stable are no longer assured within familiar family boundaries.**

For most children the point of parental separation, be it a sudden event (e.g. Sebastian) or a gradual departure (e.g. Maddie), seemed to mean the undermining of their basic assumptions about their family and their place in it. The children talked in ways suggesting they had representations<sup>16</sup> symbolic of permanency and security, of a familiar way of relating in the family, albeit perhaps conflicted at times. The geographical and/or emotional separation of the NRP seemed to undermine these assumptions and trigger or exaggerate fundamental questions about the child's relationship with each parent and the security of familiar ways of being.

### ***Relationship to Pre-PRB Parental Conflict***

Six children described positive representations of former family life, and ten, of parental conflict leading up to the separation of their parents<sup>17</sup>. For some children, the conflict had been a noticeable change from their parents' familiar relationship pattern (e.g. Rebecca, Jack) and was the point when they began to question their assumptions about

<sup>16</sup> The word 'representation' is used here instead of memories to encompass the possibility that these symbolic representations are not an exact reflection of an experience but rather an individual's interpretation of events or phenomena that may or may not have occurred or existed externally.

<sup>17</sup> Only some of these were presented as 'events' and so could be included as event themes in section 14.

family life. For others, conflict was a long-term pattern that had culminated in a final, usually unexpected, departure (e.g. Mike, Malcolm, Zena).

### Elaboration

Rebecca (aged 7 at separation) provides an example of a permanency assumption suddenly called into question:

- 136 .... when daddy walked out the door... I thought um they  
 137 had a little argument but *I never thought that daddy would leave*  
 138 *me for another lady.*
- 152 It's just that *I thought that daddy was never going to do that*
- 354 I was really scared because I thought he was never  
 355 going to come back, I was never going to see him again.

Rebecca described her NRP leaving as though he was leaving *her* as well as the other parent and considered the prospect that she would not see the NRP again. Maddie describes this metaphorically:

- 200 It's like ... before he was  
 201 very like a yo-yo, he'd be going everywhere the whole time  
 202 but now it's just like the string's broken

Examples of lower order themes from which this theme emerged are in Appendix 22.

**Table 4: Patterns and Exceptions – Theme of shattering of assumptions of permanency (details in Appendix 23)**

<b>Children who described this theme (10)</b>	Jack, Headley, Rebecca, Claire, Zena, Seb, Cathy, Malcolm, Davy, Maddie
<b>Children who did not (8)</b>	<i>Joss, Brad, Harvey, Evan, Samantha</i> (all the 'baby group') Tim, (single message story), Mike (homelessness and domestic violence during PRB), Rosie (mum hospitalised during PRB)

Eight out of 18 children did not appear to describe this 'undermining of permanency' as being associated with the separation during PRB. The 'baby group' did not mention the theme probably because they had no recollection of a former established pattern of

family life to be interrupted. Even Samantha, whose dad left a second time after reuniting very briefly at age 5, reported no memories of this event. Mike's story was dominated by descriptions of his dad's violence. It is hypothesised that this factor had complicated Mike's interpretation of the separation. The degree of perceived 'permanency' prior to separation may also have been low due to a generally chaotic family situation.

**Theme: Questioning Loveability**

**The child questioning his/her representation of him/herself as loveable/loved and wondering whether the unloveable parts of the self will be accepted / tolerated by others or rejected.**

The separation seemed to communicate to the child that one parent no longer accepted, tolerated and loved the other, and so rejected them, or there was mutual rejection. The message of intolerance or love ending between the parents seemed to raise questions for the child about continuing to be loved. Strategies to deal with these questions seemed to be related to three *context sub-themes*, the child's:

1. *Perception of the quality of the parent-child relationship.*
2. *Apparent self-identification with the rejected parent.*
3. *Interpretation of explanations given of why the NRP separated from the family.*

This theme will be elaborated by the descriptions of strategies for dealing with the child's questioning and the context in which this occurs.

## **Elaboration**

### **Context Sub-theme 1: *Perception of the quality of the parent-child relationship***

This sub-theme relates to the children recalling, or not, times when they appeared to feel loved as demonstrated by a parent's behaviour towards them before and/or after PRB.

With few memories, Davy (aged 7 at separation) had doubts as to whether his mum loved him. Davy made his doubts about being loved explicit:

833	I think it's all higgledy-piggledy in my head....
852	Because I can't remember about any, like my mum or things.
853	[baby, sad voice]
861	What she looks like, how she sounds and does she love me?
862	[flapping comfort blanket at self]
866	I shouldn't have said that. [hides face and moves away].
870	It's embarrassing me.

With very limited contact, Davy appeared uncertain about whether he was loved by the NRP after separation. In contrast, despite Malcolm recalling a poor relationship with his dad before the PRB, he had the benefit of memories of this relationship that informed him about his potential loveability, albeit in a confusing way. This perception seemed to influence his choice of strategies to address doubts about loveability (discussed on p49).

114	dad kept like saying "when you get older..." and things like that,
115	so I didn't know whether I should like be doing something or I should just sort of
116	work, so I was in a bit of a, like, tie of what I was going to do, and so I was
117	thinking of things like that most of the time.

Claire's story highlights an example of a child at the opposite end of the theme dimension (i.e. where there seems to be confidence of being loved). An extract of her story is presented in Appendix 24.

### **Sub-themes indicative of strategies to address doubts about loveability within the context of the child's perception of quality of the parent-child relationship**

#### ***Searching to clarify the self as loveable/loved***

Bolstering representations of the self as loveable/loved seemed to be attempted by

referring to or seeking evidence of love when in doubt. Davy's story provides an example of where this evidence was not readily available as it was for Claire. Davy discusses his attempts to find out.

882            I'd like to find out. [face covered]  
884        R.        Where would you find that out from?  
886        D        I don't have a clue. Telephone. Letter. Wait! wait! (excitedly  
887            finds his mother's letters) I've just got some proof here. I've just  
888            found one! Proof! [Davy presents letters]

Davy showed letters from his mum ending "love mum" as evidence of her love for him, yet his previous doubts suggested that this was not enough to reassure him. Sebastian seemed only to refer to meagre evidence of being loved:

199            Even when I see him he says "I miss you".  
201            I saw him a couple of days ago in his work van  
202            and dad waved out of the window and went "hi!"

### *Attempts to be/seem more loveable*

Where the child's relationship with the parent does not make the child feel loved/loveable, the child may be proactive in becoming so. Headley wanted to change his attitudes and behaviour to appear more loveable to his dad.

435            I just want people  
436            to explain to me and give me warnings before they just shout  
437            at me...  
438            ... rules on the board over there in the  
439            kitchen would be a good idea and my behaviour would  
440            increase to really good behaviour. You know, and then that  
441            would go on to my dad and he'd feel, hopefully he'd feel a bit  
442            more like in place, and happy to see that I'm developing in an  
443            adult and more mature ways.

Based upon his pre-PRB relationship with his dad, Malcolm was able to identify computing as something his dad would value/love in him.

130            ...I'm quite into  
131            computers...  
  
143            he thought the computer thing was good, he was quite proud of  
144            that, because that was an oncoming thing about when I was ten...  
  
186            I think I might have tried to  
187            be like him when he left, so that's what made me like I am now

### ***Managing feelings of rejection***

Malcolm had a difficult relationship with his father even before PRB. His quandary is illustrated by the following quotes from his interview:

- 39                   ...so I didn't like him very much and so it was a bit of a good  
40                   riddance because after that I had friends coming round...
- 257                  ...sort of thought 'will it be better if he left or should he stay?'
- 298                  dad and mum had their views and I had a different view, I  
299                  thought he could have stayed for a bit longer. I knew I didn't want him to stay  
300                  forever.

Mike's declaration (quoted in Appendix 25) 'I don't really mind [that my dad does not want to see me]' is unconvincing in light of the surrounding discourse, particularly the extreme view of his father's "hate" for him after a time when he "used to" get along. During the interview and in this discourse there was emotional flatness consistent with Mike's high CBCL scores for depression and anxiety. It will be seen later that both Malcolm and Mike identified partly with their dads or had appreciated aspects of them (see p51). However, it could be hypothesised that these children also defended against feeling vulnerable to rejection by their dads, by rejecting their dads for example, by claiming not to care about being rejected.

**Table: 5 Patterns and Exceptions – Theme Recall of Receiving Parent's Love**

<b>Mentioned recall of receiving NRP's love pre-PRB</b> (7)	Jack, Rebecca, Claire, Zena, Cathy, Malcolm and Mike (both latter described <u>also</u> not receiving it)
<b>Mentioned recall of receiving NRP's love post-PRB</b> (11)	Claire, Cathy, <i>Harvey</i> , <i>Samantha</i> , Seb, <i>Joss</i> , Headley, Rebecca (both latter described <u>also</u> not receiving it) (Zena, Mike, Davy described <u>only</u> not receiving it)
<b>Children who did not mention this theme</b> (5)	<i>Bradley</i> , <i>Evan</i> , ('baby group'), Tim, Rosie (stories with one/ no message), Maddie (discussed in relation to her RP)

## **Context Sub-theme 2: Identification with the rejected parent**

Where the reasons for separation are unknown or assumed to be an intolerance of a parent by the other parent, the child may fear rejection by identifying with aspects of the rejected parent. Mike (aged nearly 7 at separation) described his fears of being like his dad<sup>18</sup>.

417                    I don't want to be a violent person, [dad] was just violent but I don't want to be like it.  
418                    That's one of my biggest worries.

This triangulates with Mike's mum's own accounts of her identification of Mike with his father. Mike was the only child who clearly showed this theme.

Jack (aged 7 at separation) appeared to identify closely with his dad<sup>19</sup> but it was unclear from his story whether this made him fear rejection by his mum. There is some evidence to suggest he might.

## **Sub-themes indicative of strategies to address doubts about loveability** **within the context of identification with the rejected parent**

### ***Maintenance of a representation of the rejected parent***

Mike seemed to maintain identification with positive aspects of his dad, keeping them alive as an emotional link.

148                    She won't understand that, well, he was half a nice  
149                    person. He was a sort of nice person, and he could be.

He describes the positive features of dad he shares, for example:

241                    Well, I'm not sounding a bit big headed but I'm quite  
242                    clever...and he was quite a good drawer, and I'm quite  
243                    good.

Mike expressed continued sympathy for his dad despite the violence wrought on the

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<sup>18</sup> Mike's story has been abridged in Appendix 25.

<sup>19</sup> See family drawing and abridged extract of story in Appendix 26.

family.

64 I can't trust him to be  
65 with me because he's such a violent person.  
67 R. What's that like for you?  
69 M Upsetting sometimes, and scary others because  
70 like you don't know what he's going to do.  
74 The upsetting bit is that um.... well, he never  
75 really had a life.  
79 Well, he didn't have many friends. Basically he  
80 was sort of a loner, if you know what I mean. I felt sorry for  
81 him.

The deep sympathy shown towards his father may reflect a fear about his own future, besides his angry behaviour, as he too has few friends and is socially isolated (consistent with his CBCL social problem and competence scores reaching the clinical cut off). This triangulates with his mum's report that "it's since he's got older, his father's the same, his father doesn't have any friends". All the children showed some sympathy/affection for their NRP, even Malcolm, yet none but Mike showed the depth of feeling regarding traits so similar to the child's own.

### **Context Sub-theme 3: Interpretation of explanations given of why the NRP separated from the family**

At least five children including Cathy and Samantha, lacked information necessary to enable a clear grasp of the context of the separations<sup>20</sup>. The way the explanation was given and subsequent parental attitudes and behaviour appeared very important in children's capacity to make sense of explanations why their NRP left them.

Jack's story is one of many that highlights the confusion about which parent was the 'rejector'. In Jack's case, the parents had clearly stated who was responsible and why, yet Jack remained confused by the conflicting observable evidence. Cathy was also clearly

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<sup>20</sup> Based upon parent reports of child's knowledge.



confused about who rejected whom through having received different accounts. Cathy goes on to explain how knowing who was the rejector or “evil” parent might affect her relationship with her dad.

620            I'm  
621            getting panicked that I'll like just get pushed a little bit more on  
622            to mum's side  
625            it would change the way I talk to [dad], and what  
626            sort of things we did  
636            and we won't be so nice and  
637            happy.

**Theme: Questioning Being Held in Mind**

**This concerns the child's representations of him/her self as being held in the parent's mind, that is, the parent's perceived preparedness to maintain contact with the child, to remember the child in their absence and to think about and meet the child's needs. This also relates to the child's perceived power to have his/her needs met**

A theme that seems best characterised as one of 'questioning being held in mind' is particularly prominent in the children's descriptions of the events of the NRP living separately and establishing a new life. Once again, sub-themes emerged relating to context and strategies.

**Elaboration**

Headley's story illustrates the distinction between being 'held in mind' in terms of parents maintaining contact and the parent's sensitivity to the child's needs. This distinction of revealed in Headley's dilemma (explaining why he mentioned both being and not being held in mind). Headley's dad wished to see him regularly but contact was on dad's terms and dad was unwilling to adjust to Headley's needs to do sporting competitions.

269           It makes me feel a bit  
 270           annoyed and a bit [pause] sad.  
 274           ...that he can't co-operate with my mum and that I can't see him  
 275           as much. That's the saddest bit and that he... keeps on  
 276           having arguments with me about whether I can go to football  
 277           or not or to swimming...

Two *context sub-themes* emerged, the child's:

1.     *Perception of the quality of the parent-child relationship.*
2.     *Interpretation of explanations given of why the NRP separated from the remaining family.*

The context was hypothesised to influence the strategies used by the children to manage 'questioning being held in mind'.

#### **Contextual Sub-theme 1: Perception of the quality of the parent-child relationship**

This sub-theme is illustrated by the contrast between Claire's and Zena's stories. Claire (age 5 at separation) had retained positive representations of herself as 'held in mind' by her dad as she witnessed him change his job to enable frequent visits. Zena (age 5 at separation) was an example of a child who had recalled being held in mind before separation evidenced by the consistency of her dad's attentiveness to her:

138           [Dad] *always* used to give me a cuddle and a bedtime story...

However, once dad had left and began decreasing contact, she was concerned that her previously attentive dad would not meet her needs to be with him in the future:

156           It's like, he's *always* taking my brother and sister out...  
 158           ...but he hardly  
 159           ever takes me out any more... [sad voice].

And that she had no power to influence her dad's actions:

237           It's really, really upsetting and you kind of feel angry like you want to go  
 238           back and get dad back

Malcolm provides a more extreme example of not being 'held in mind' as his dad broke

contact almost entirely, preventing Malcolm from relying on him (emotionally and practically) at all.

49            he used to like make tea  
50            because mum is a terrible cook and I had to learn how to do it  
51            myself

105           I used to rely on mum and dad to do like everything  
106           for me and now I do it myself.

### **Themes indicative of strategies in context of perceived quality of parent-child relationship**

#### ***Development of independence***

Where parents were perceived as unreliable as they did not prioritise or meet the child's needs, children such as Malcolm, seemed to make themselves invulnerable to needing the parent, removing all emotional and practical reliance on them. This seems like an angry stance not atypical of a middle teenager but Malcolm is only just 12 although he looked and behaved considerably older.

84            I'm definitely more independent now and I think I do dad's job around  
85            the house  
86            and I've got me room upstairs and that's like *where I am*,  
89            I'm really like "you can't control me" at the moment. That's my feeling. I'm  
90            independent at the moment, that's what's really the main change.

Headley is the only other child to talk about independence. Headley saw this as a panacea for meeting his needs; a means of overcoming the difficulties of relying on his dad to be flexible and enable him to enjoy his own interests and negotiate seeing his dad at his convenience.

#### ***Seeking evidence of 'being held in mind'***

Where the quality of the relationship was less certain for some children following separation, they appeared to resort to seeking evidence of being held in mind. Maddie's mum reported Maddie's tendency to comment that she will telephone her dad but rarely

did, instead relying on her dad calling her. One hypothesis would be that Maddie wanted to receive evidence of being held in mind by the parent. If she had phoned dad, this would have provided less evidence. Maddie touched on her uncertainty about being 'held in mind' saying:

183           ...he's always saying "I'll never  
184           forget you" on the phone or "I'll phone", um, "Please phone  
185           me up soon", and, because he's working all the time, um,  
186           needs us to phone up him, but when we don't because  
187           we're doing something else or something, I don't know what  
188           he's feeling. Because if he's not here then I don't know what  
189           he's actually doing or feeling or (sigh) what's happening.

Sebastian (waves and invitations) and Davy (letters and phone calls) also passively waited for this evidence from the parent. In all these cases, the separation was seen as the parent's own choice and the children appeared to feel powerless to confront their parent about this. Others, such as Cathy and Rebecca did confront their dad's directly.

### ***Maintaining the child's symbolic presence with the parent***

Where the child sees him/herself as distant and/or absent from the parents' life, visible signs of this through commuting between homes (Samantha, Maddie), missing events e.g. granddad dying (Bradley) appeared to increase anxieties about whether the child was held in mind. Maddie was particularly preoccupied with fears of forgetting between her self and her dad (see abridged story on this issue in Appendix 27).

146           ...I always put a leaf in [dad's car]...  
148           whenever I come back it's always dead there but still there and  
149           that makes me feel that he's not going to forget me.

183           he's always saying "I'll never  
184           forget you"...

203           He's just gone really.

For Maddie, her main concerns were fears of abandonment between visits whereas for Rebecca and Headley, their concerns were not having their needs met during visits.

Headley and Rebecca had a routine for seeing the NRP, making it regular and predictable. Without this routine currently, Maddie finds:

128 when  
129 I'm getting onto the train, it's just like I'm never going to see  
130 [dad] again, like I'm moving to a different country.

Six children did not achieve a routine even years after separation and this might explain why they continued to feel at risk of or to actually be experiencing total abandonment (e.g. Mike, Sebastian, Brad, Davy, Zena and Malcolm).

**Table 6: Patterns and Exceptions - Theme Questioning of Being Held in Mind**

Children who mention theme	Held in Mind	Not Held in Mind	Mention Unsure	Not Mention
Before PRB	Claire, Cathy, Zena	Malcolm, Maddie	Davy,	Tim, Rosie, Sebastian,
After PRB	Claire, Cathy, Harvey, Headley, Samantha	Malcolm, Zena, Headley, Rebecca, Mike	Maddie	Jack, Evan, Jocelyn, Brad

*'baby group' in italics*

**Context Sub-theme 2: Interpretation of explanations given of why the NRP separated from the family**

Headley illustrates an aspect of this sub-theme. He assumed that his dad had initiated the separation when actually his mum also had an affair and initiated it.

510 R So what do you think happened?  
513 H Maybe daddy started seeing someone else, and didn't tell mummy

Headley was angry with his dad for 'choosing' to work so far away from Headley and his mum (and so not prioritise Headley's needs).

224 he says he wants to see me, and if he'd just co-  
225 operate maybe I could see him a bit more

It might be assumed that with a wider understanding of the context, Headley might have been less partisan and angry solely towards his dad if he knew all the facts.

By contrast, for other children, information, or lack of it, was used as a strategy to ward

off feeling not held in mind.

### **Themes indicative of strategies to address doubts about being held in mind**

#### ***Transferring and suspending parent's responsibility***

This strategy transfers responsibility for the separation onto another in order to preserve a view of the parent as not continuing to hold the child in mind. It is evident in the quote of Headley above. For Cathy, this took the form of an angry reminder to the world that “we miss our dads” as she criticised the arrangements for contact with dad.

339 It's probably the law or something because children  
340 need their mothers lots but they also miss their dads!

This was despite Cathy's experience of dad cancelling visits and her having to beg him to reschedule them (reported by mum) and resumed only after Cathy became very distressed and her mum intervened.

Cathy also attempted to suspend overall responsibility for the separation by “sitting on the fence”. Cathy had observed the discrepancies between her parents' accounts of how the marriage ended and felt she had to take sides:

103 I'm kind of sitting on the fence. Don't know where to  
104 go or whose side I'm on.  
107 I want to know if my mum is evil and  
108 done this all to daddy. Daddy says he didn't want to divorce but  
109 mummy just found the papers and said, and he just had to  
110 agree and then mummy says it was his idea and she just went  
111 along with it because she wanted the best for us.

“She wanted the best for us” implies holding the needs of the child in mind in a new family structure and so goes to the heart of the questioning process. Cathy goes on to explain however, that an answer to her questioning might negatively affect her relationship with her dad:

620 I'm  
621 getting panicked that I'll like just get pushed a little bit more on  
622 to mum's side  
625 it would change the way I talk to [dad], and what  
626 sort of things we did

Children who mentioned theme	Tim (blamed mum for lack of contact even though aware dad had had a drink problem), Cathy (the law/courts), Zena (explained lack of contact on being the eldest child and priority having to go to younger siblings), Headley (blamed his dad)
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**Theme: Parental Containment**

**Refers to the child’s perception of the parent’s abilities and willingness to contain the child’s emotions and enable the child to come to terms with new relationship experiences and thus manage fears of not being loved or held in mind by open communication and parents’ positive and sensitive behaviour towards the child.**

There was variation in the children’s relating how their parents managed their own and the child’s emotions in relation to PRB. These qualities of a containing parent interaction are hypothesised to reinforce loveability in the child’s view of self and an expectation that the child is sufficiently held in mind by the parent to reassure the child that his/her needs (as distinct from wants) will be met.

**Elaboration**

The theme of parental containment emerged from seven sub-themes concerning interactional factors the children identified that seemed to influence containment in post-PRB relationships. The sub-themes are presented below in Table 7 and described in more detail with example quotes in Appendix 28.

**Table 7. Interactional Factors Children Identified that seemed to Influence Containment in Post-PRB Relationships**

<b>Sub-Theme and Number of Participants</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Willingness and ability to share proximity (8)</b>	Parent's ability to share proximity with the other parent. Involves: appropriately managing any negative feelings towards the other parent to enable parents to negotiate issues concerning child without embroiling child.
<b>Parent's differing / conflicting stories of PRB - "good versus evil" (6)</b>	Where parents reveal differing and incongruent stories of PRB that may imply blaming the other parent
<b>Showing interest in the child (10)</b>	Emotional capacity to take an interest in child's activities and qualities that are integral to the child's sense of self as loveable/valuable.
<b>Preparedness to embrace aspects of the child's loved other parent (6)</b>	Preparedness to embrace those aspects of the child that relate to the other parent non-judgementally showing a capacity to love the whole child.
<b>Appropriate expression of negative feelings by the parent (6)</b>	Refers to fears of being told off or when parents told the child off inappropriately due to venting anger or jealousy.
<b>Perceived parent vulnerability 1) imposed burdening of parental emotions (4)</b>	Parental interaction that is laden with expressed emotion that is uncontained can sometimes have the quality of a burden for the child.
<b>2) Adoption of responsibility for parent wellbeing (8)</b>	Relates to the child's subtle interpretations of the parents' interaction with the child as emotionally or physically vulnerable.



## **PART IV    DISCUSSION**

### **Overview of Part IV Sections:**

- 16.**    *Discussion of Results* – research questions will be discussed in turn with reference to relevant literature. A preliminary model will be presented.
- 17.**    *Critique of Findings and Methodology* – particularly the combining of analytic methods and research with children.
- 18.**    *Clinical Implications* – for clinicians and parents.
- 19.**    *Suggestions for Further Research.*
- 20.**    *Conclusion.*

### **16.    Discussion of Results**

#### **16.1   Research Question 1**

An important observation was that the summary of the main PRB events indicated that it was generally not a matter of a particular circumscribed event impacting on children but rather an ongoing series of subtle experiences that must be understood within their wider contexts and personal meanings. This was consistent with the observations of Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1999). The summary also highlights the significance of the relationship with the NRP to the children, supporting the author's decision that this should be the focus of research question 2. The methodology would have enabled this assumption to be disproved by the children as they had the opportunity to discuss whatever they wished.

Early readings of the stories revealed to the author the striking similarity of children's descriptions/themes to those found in other child-focused studies (reviewed by Mitchell, 1987; see 4.0). However, as analysis progressed, the author's categories went beyond those described in some previous studies, and this was perhaps because holistic story analysis enabled more in-depth interpretation.

## **16.2 Research Question 2**

Based upon the emergent themes and sub-themes, a preliminary model was devised and is presented in Figure 1. The aim of the Model was to capture an impression of the children's experiences and associated mechanisms of PRB.

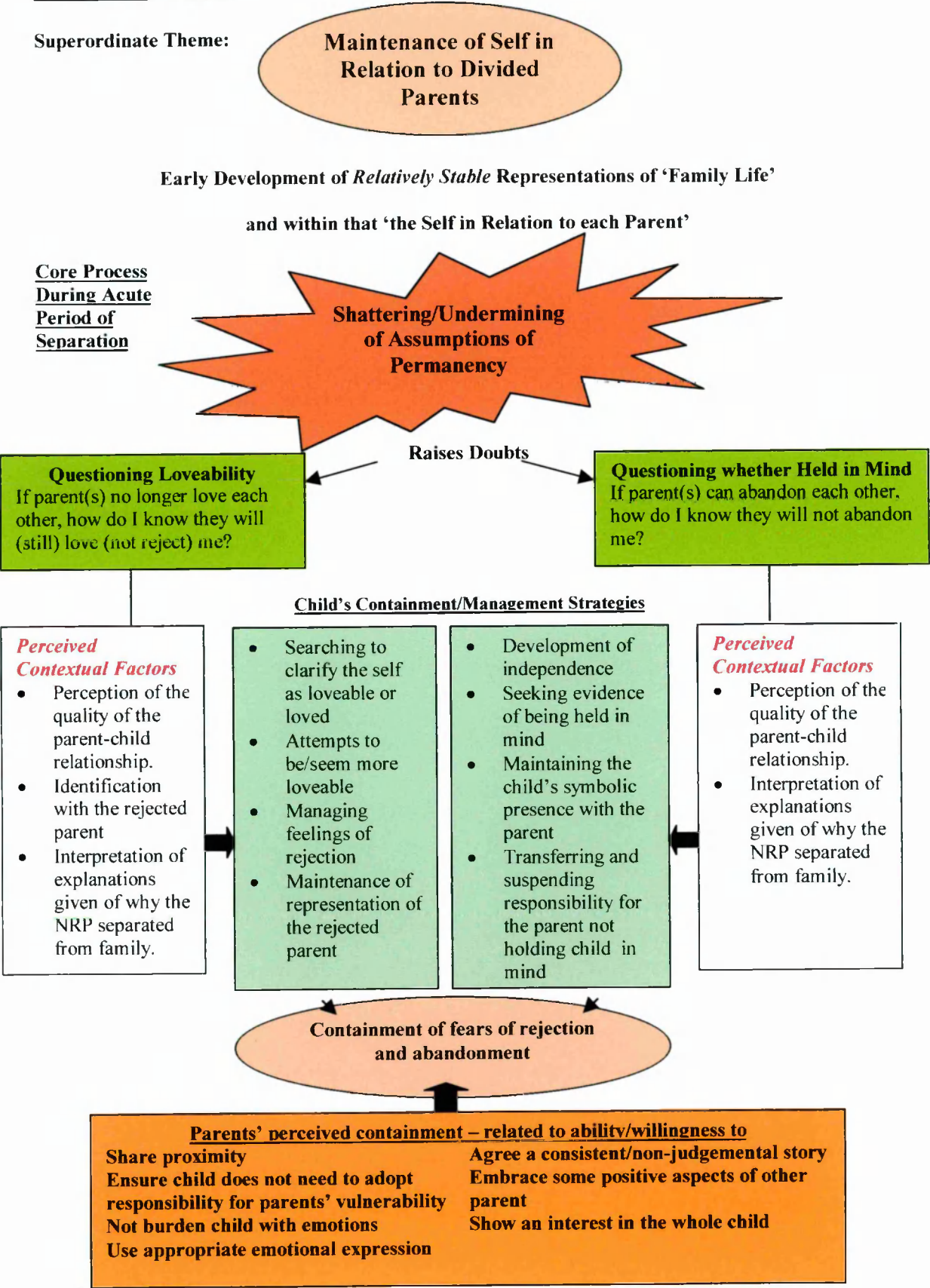
### ***Maintenance of self in relation to divided parents***

The author speculated that the overall mechanism influencing the children's experience was the 'maintenance of the self in relation to divided parents'. For most children, the family "all together" was viewed as a panacea of relative security and contentment. This representation appeared to symbolise, and could be explained in terms of, "homeostasis" (Jackson, 1957). Homeostasis is "centrally concerned with the interplay of unconscious fears, anxieties, and attachments in families" (Dallos, 1997) to maintain (parental) attachments to ensure needs are met (Wile, 1981). The children's experience of PRB might be described as attempts to maintain parental functioning, amidst a gradual or sudden breakdown of the homeostatic mechanism that formerly supported it.

### ***Theme of Shattering Assumptions of Permanency***

This 'internal' representation of stable family life resembles internal working models from attachment theory (Holmes, 1993) or self-schemas (Beck, 1967). All are characterised as intrapsychic, guiding models of the external world, including the self as it relates to others, constructed through early 'real life' experiences that guide the child's subsequent interpretations of relationships and experiences, and responses to the external world.

**Figure 1. Description and Elaboration of the Preliminary Model of children's experiences of PRB**



The departure of the parent, once it is perceived as something beyond the familiar family relationship pattern, undermines 'assumptions of permanency' relied upon by the child to ensure security and wellbeing. Janoff-Bulman (1992) hypothesised that stable, basic assumptions about the world and the self enable people to generally experience the world as safe, predictable and valuing of the person. He argued that traumatic events "shatter" these assumptions and the person becomes preoccupied with security in the external world. The separation events undermining permanency assumptions are perceived as a threat to the child's security, producing feelings of anxiety. Jack's description of being "nearly sick" indicated the degree of anxiety and shock, that he felt unequipped and unprepared for.

Children's experience of this 'threat' may be understood in terms of Lazarus's (1966) model of coping, which suggested that a person weighs up the perceived threat (primary appraisal) against available resources (secondary appraisal). The threat of separation may be perceived as great and resources or power to change parents' minds as small where children have few representations of themselves as loved and held in mind. This may be hypothesised to produce negative appraisal and feelings of powerlessness to preserve family unity and permanency. This is predicted to influence the strategies children may use to achieve security again.

### ***Questioning Loveability and Being Held in Mind***

The child is hypothesised to begin to question his/her sense of self as loved and of importance to the parents perhaps as a consequence of this evidence of powerlessness. It was significant that even the children in the most loving and caring families such as

Claire's and Rebecca's experienced an undermining of their assumptions that the parents would continue to care for and love them. This suggested that the questioning of loveability/love and being held in mind were universal phenomena in the 'older group', but not in the 'baby group'. The developmental literature suggests younger children do not have the language and memory skills necessary (Schwartz, 1992) to enable them to recount such a questioning process. The possibility of these children having gone through an experience that undermined their feeling of safety and loveability should not be discounted.

Questioning 'loveability' seemed to relate directly to the child's sense of self being loved and accepted or of being rejected. Thus the fundamental anxiety related to the rejection of the child's self by the parent. Questioning of being 'held in mind' related to the primary function of the family, to meet the basic needs of the child through close proximity and sensitivity towards the child, essential in evolutionary and emotional terms to preserve the child's well-being. It also relates to the child's sense of self as being able to attain a position of 'being held in mind'. If this is perceived as not attainable, the child may fear abandonment at any time (Holmes, 1993) but particularly when the family structures maintaining proximity and familiar caregiving routines break down. This fear of abandonment may have been based upon reality rather than solely an intrapsychic scenario as Hetherington (1999) found that the "diminished emotional attachment that often goes with separation from one's child" (p130) does increase risk of the NRP not holding the child in mind.

Taking a cognitive-developmental perspective of 'self' development, the older group (pre-operational or concrete operational at separation and at interview) might be

expected to “proceed inductively...piecing together bits of data from experience in order to construct a puzzle of the self” (Harter, 1983, p294). This process could clearly be seen in the children’s descriptions of piecing together a story that tells of their parents’ relationships with them. Harter suggested that the child may “simultaneously compare one’s own characteristics to those of others” and has “the ability to imagine what other people are thinking...of him or her” (p294). Therefore, experiencing or witnessing rejection, criticism and abandonment (of a loved parent) might be of particular significance.

### ***Attempts to be/seem more loveable***

The children’s attempts to take responsibility for perceived rejection by attempting to change features of the self to attract and accommodate the rejecting parent were reminiscent of Janoff-Bulman’s controversial adaptive strategy of ‘self-blame’. Headley’s attempts to make himself more loveable by wishing to change his behaviour and attitudes could be seen as an example of “behavioural self-blame”. By placing the burden of change on oneself to adjust to the new relationship, negative implications may arise for the child’s self esteem, but a last vestige of hope and sense of control over their capacity to be loved and cared for is sustained. This process allows assimilation of cognitive and emotional experiences necessary to re-build assumptions of permanency, based upon this new relationship.

### ***Transferring responsibility for causing abandonment***

Epstein (1973) described the “need for internal consistency and a need to maintain the organisation of the self-system”. This may perhaps explain the tendency for some children to ignore quite contradictory information about the self in relation to a parent, as

seen in Claire's and Cathy's interpretations of their dad's decision to reduce contact. Cathy even described the need to "sit on the fence" and not try and resolve the contradictions through fear that this would force a change in her relationship with a parent. The need to bypass "empirical validity" (Epstein, 1973) may mistakenly be viewed as the child's naïve or illogical thinking when in reality it is a means of avoiding the restructuring of internal representations of the self and the world – a means therefore of preservation of aspects of permanency to give a stable identity of being loved and ability to love.

Alternatively, both the searching for evidence of love and the transferral of responsibility for separation could be seen as forms of denial of the reality of the situation to defend against feelings of sadness, fear or anger (Goldberger, 1983)<sup>21</sup>.

Unambiguous and accurate information adds clarity to the appraisal of the relationship threat, be it positive (realising he/she is loved) or negative (for example, Michael realising that he is not). This clarity can be tremendously painful to receive but without it, if the child does not become 'contained' by a positive appraisal, they may remain 'uncontained' and in distress, wondering whether the threat will come to fruition (Sebastian). Close proximity and/or frequent contact are tangible means of receiving information about being 'held in mind' and seemed to aid positive appraisal.

### ***"Good versus evil parent"***

Dichotomous thinking, a characteristic of the concrete operational child (Schwartz, 1992), together with the development of 'moral reasoning' (Piaget, 1932), may heighten

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<sup>21</sup> Defined as "a refusal to recognise the reality of a traumatic situation".

sensitivity to authority and fairness, polarising “good and evil” or “right and wrong”. Children appear to categorise the parents and possibly themselves in terms of moral and attachment positions of good and bad, loved and unloved, without a full understanding of the subtleties of relationships. This polarisation can be enhanced by contradictory or polarised parental stories which may motivate children to think that they had to take sides (e.g. Cathy) (Gorell Barnes and Dowling, 1997). This institutes a ‘loyalty dilemma’ (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980) that can enhance fears of rejection by the apparent need to be ‘disloyal’ to the ‘bad’ parent.

This dilemma is perhaps influenced by the poor understanding of causality (Kim, et al., 1997). Most of the children had extremely limited information concerning the cause of the separation. Knowing why an event happens is thought to provide a buffer for psychological distress (Kim, et al., 1997). The suggestion that parents are not telling “the truth” (Cathy) about the cause of the PRB increases uncertainty about the parent-child relationship. They can no longer rely on old assumptions of the permanency of familiar ways of interacting to predict future threats in the family.

Taboos and family secrets about conflicting family members make open discussion of factual and balanced information difficult to raise and clarify for the child (Imber-Black, 1993). Parents appeared to contribute to the family ‘disequilibrium’ and so a lack of containment of the child through this means and through ongoing conflict (Hess and Camera, 1979).



### ***Child's perception of the quality of the parent-child relationship***

Attachment theory offers a persuasive description of the relationship qualities of importance in making family life seem secure and 'permanent' (discussed in Holmes, 1993). Many of the features children identified as significant for the containment of their questioning were features of parental 'sensitivity' described by Main (1995), for example, offering responsive and unconditional caregiving, consistency, close proximity and an attentive interest in the child.

The children's desire that the NRP take more interest in their interests, achievements and relationships was consistent with research by McLanahan (1999) who found that there was a substantial decline in parental involvement after PRB even when pre-PRB involvement levels are accounted for. Children therefore appear aware of this change and perhaps interpret it negatively as doubts about the parents' love and continuing commitment towards them.

Furthermore, one could hypothesise that those children who were able to contain fears of rejection and abandonment relatively easily had more secure attachments to the parent pre and/or post PRB (Claire and Cathy). Their quiet confidence in the relationship enabled exploration and freedom to be themselves. Cathy protested loudly when she was threatened with abandonment by her dad yet this was quickly dispersed once he resumed contact. This is a pattern consistent with a 'separation anxiety' response observed by Ainsworth (1982) in securely attached younger children. These sisters were fortunate as their dad backed down and resumed regular contact and related to them much as before. This inner confidence was present for most of the 'baby group' as evidenced by Harvey.

### ***Parental rejection and the development of independence***

The anxious attachments of older children can be seen in Maddie, who feared abandonment by both parents and lacked the confidence to express herself (fearing abandonment by making her mother cross). Sebastian and Malcolm show some signs of ambivalent/avoidant attachments. They described a mixture of a desire to see their dad and a dismissal of their needs to do so. Malcolm's independent and rather emotionally detached style of relating ("I know I'm not the most deeply emotional person anyway") suggested a more avoidant attachment style employed to manage the unreliability of his parents by removal from consciousness ('defensive exclusion'; Rutter, 1994). Ambivalent attachment combines defensive exclusion with clingy, submissive behaviour observed in Sebastian.

Malcolm's independence can be viewed in terms of his development. He was now able to introspect and think hypothetically about his life. As a result of being able to compare hypothetical scenarios, he was able to re-evaluate the PRB as a positive event ("it was probably a good change") enabling him to be in control and move on. Janoff-Bulman (1992) described such strategies as an adaptive means of enabling a person to assimilate the experience into safe assumptions of the world.

### ***Internalisation of the Parent***

The internalisation by the child of the rejection of one parent by the other, by 'self-identification' (Kalter, 1987) with the rejected parent, seems to describe Michael's experience of PRB. As a consequence, Michael appeared to strive towards being viewed as different from his dad ("anti-identification" - Chethik, Dolin, Davies, Lohr and Darrow. 1986, p129) and so protect himself from similar rejection. However, Michael

appeared to employ complex internalising strategies to *maintain* an emotional link with his dad and defend against the feelings of sadness and anger associated with his loss (Chethik, et al. 1986).

## **17. Critique of Findings and Methodology**

### **17.1 Limitations of the Findings**

The foundations of the model are that children have assumptions of permanency that may be undermined and are central to older children's experiences following PRB. However, Wallerstein (1991) highlighted the difficulty of research and generating a theoretical framework when there are "many complex interacting constitutional, psychological, social, and economic factors" that shape the lives of children over many years. This complexity of factors influencing the children's experiences and responses could only be partially differentiated, meaning the findings may be over-simplified. Transferability is limited by this.

Analysis of higher order themes was hampered by lack of in-depth discussion of meaning from the children. The themes of 'loveability' and 'held in mind' remain difficult concepts to comprehend and differentiate when viewed in the abstract. The terms are, however, descriptive of the stories recounted by the children when analysed in the story context, making the distinction clearer.

Some questions that arose from the study remained unanswered. For example, identification seemed to occur only in the boys whereas Kalter (1987) had observed it primarily in girls. Do girls express it differently? The author felt that maybe Rebecca did identify with her mother but there was insufficient text to ground this.

Overall, the findings of this study revealed features and patterns highly consistent with other studies and additionally provides an integrative framework supportive of Wallerstein (1983/1984). This seems to support the trustworthiness of the findings.

## **17.2 Limitations of Methodology**

Integrating grounded theory and narrative analysis methodology was found to be a useful way of exploring children's experiences. Narrative analysis aided the sorting of often incoherent and jumbled data into clearer narratives. This clarification of the 'message' enhanced local and global coherence and provided a platform for grounded theory to systematically integrate non-story data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

### ***Recruitment and Response Bias***

Despite significant difficulties in recruitment, the author attempted to obtain a sample containing children living under a variety of circumstances. This aim was broadly achieved through the wide-ranging community recruitment strategies. It was assumed before commencing the study that there would be a high risk of a biased sample towards overly anxious, guilty or child-sensitive parent participants. This was not found to be the case. Examples of reasons given for participation are presented in Appendix 29. However, considering the sample was from non-clinical sources where the separation was not recent, surprisingly many child participants seemed to be in the midst of ongoing adjustment to the PRB. A few had behaviour or emotional problems that suggest it would be appropriate for them to receive clinical services (Michael, Davy).

### ***Criticism of Descriptive Measures***

The CFSEI-2 was less well constructed than anticipated at piloting. Some participants were critical of its repetitive and confusing questions. As discussed, the norms were standardised on a US sample, and may be of limited relevance to this sample. There appeared to be little variation in the children's responses suggesting a ceiling effect. By contrast, the CBCL was found to be very useful and consistent with other data, such as the parents' general references to the children's behaviour and the children's own descriptions.

### ***Theoretical Saturation and Quality of Interviews***

The emergent model can be adopted only tentatively since theoretical saturation was not reached due to two main factors, the small sample and the nature of the interviews. The emphasis in interview was upon giving the children the opportunity to tell *their* story without the imposition of the author's ideas. Whilst Nelson (1989) suggests that storytelling is a form of discourse developed early in life, a few children clearly had difficulty forming a story structure. Attempts to combine this child-led approach with guided explorative questioning were often hampered since the children frequently abandoned their narrative and awaited guidance on required responses once questions were asked.

There was usually insufficient time after storytelling to return to topics for greater depth and when this was attempted, the children generally had lost their train of thought or repeated their earlier responses. This was observed less in the older children suggesting

that the development of language, abstract thought and interpersonal understanding may facilitate the construction of narratives that clearly reveal the meaning of the narrative.

The volume of data made it necessary to use the type of coding suggested by Smith (1995) in preference to line by line coding. Smith could be criticised for not staying close enough to the data. On the other hand, Pidgeon (1996) highlighted the criticism of grounded theory, of the tendency for analysis to amount to no more than a re-description of the data or content analysis. The author was constantly aware of the balance between re-description and over-interpretation during analysis and presentation of data. The use of 'constant comparison' meant the systematic re-examination of the data, thus preventing the author's own prior assumptions being imposed on to the analysis and ensuring a reasonable level of trustworthiness.

### ***Trustworthiness***

Attempts were made to ensure the analysis met the assumptions of trustworthiness. Reviews by the supervisor, two clinical psychologists and two divorced parents (non-participants) supported the persuasiveness of the findings. Analysis of the data was grounded by identifying sufficient supportive data and by considering the presenting instances where children's accounts did not fit. Since respondent validation was not considered ethically or philosophically compatible in this study, opportunities for reader validation were incorporated by the presentation of data and cases to allow consideration of *correspondence*.

The reader can measure *auditability and analytical accountability* by examination of descriptions of the research process in PART II and III and the research diary.

Reflexivity was an important element of the latter process. Whilst the author has attempted to delineate clearly the nature and bases for analysis and highlight prior expectations and bias using the research diary, it was not possible to remove entirely reliance on the author's own subjectivity. Rather than view assumptions and identification as negative bias, they were used as a means of examining inevitable subjective interpretations by a process of constant comparison with the author's own experiences and exploration of alternative perspectives. It is hoped that this gave added depth to the interpretation<sup>22</sup>.

Efforts were made to ensure that each narrative was coherent in relation to the child's whole story. Also, *global coherence* of interpretation across narratives and stories was clarified by exploring negative cases and discriminations of varying contextual factors. Due to insufficient space, it was not possible to present large excerpts of all the stories to enable coherence to be examined closely for "audit" but abridged excerpts of stories of a few children are presented for this purpose.

The families came from diverse circumstances (including domestic violence and parental mental illness). The definition of PRB itself was broad. Some critics argue that these and other factors should have been controlled. However, Wallerstein (1991) has acknowledged the difficulty of accounting for the complexity of PRB families and Riessman (1993) suggests that qualitative research highlights the many subtle, but no less influential, differences in circumstances and experiences making sterile distinctions untenable and exclusionary. Instead, the author grappled with the added meaning of

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<sup>22</sup> This was explored in the author's personal therapy as well as supervision and diary entries.

these additional factors in living with PRB when considering the transferability of the findings.

Transferability is limited by sample size and the sample being exclusively from non-clinical sources. Consistent with the assumption of generativity, this study has been able to generate a variety of questions facilitating further exploration in future studies (for example, the application of the concept of trauma to children's experiences of PRB).

Finally, the author has been invited to present the findings of this study to a Child and Family Consultation Service that provides 'divorce groups' for children and for parents. The author intends to use this opportunity to receive feedback on the findings and methodology of the study. This will test the rhetorical power of the study and its transferability to clinicians' experiences in specialist services. Research summaries will also be provided to the children and parents setting out the main findings of the study, although no feedback will be given regarding individual children<sup>23</sup>.

## **18. Implications of the Present Research**

### **18.1 Clinical Implications**

Modest clinical implications arise from this research at present. More research needs to be undertaken to develop fully the tentative model. It would be inappropriate to transfer or generalise the findings to other children or wider clinical practice without further research. However, the study does highlight issues relevant to parents and clinical services.

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<sup>23</sup> The reasons for this are the same as for being unable to perform respondent validity summarised in Appendix 4.



The main implications for assessment and intervention relate to the importance of understanding the meaning of PRB for the child, and its impact upon the child's feelings of safety and security. Where the PRB was some time ago, it should not be assumed that its influence has ceased. A thorough assessment must consider the child's present and past contexts and whether there are any strategies the child is continuing to employ to manage ongoing instability that may no longer be adaptive for the child (for example, emotional detachment). This might usefully be thought about in terms of loveability and being held in mind.

Parents are now obliged to attempt to agree PRB issues relating to children outside the courts, and mediation is only used for a brief period with minimal involvement of children. Services may therefore wish to consider how best parents and children could access services for advice and support<sup>24</sup>. Such a service must be able to provide individualised advice and offer assessment of needs. Such a service must be accessible not only in the immediate aftermath of PRB but as an ongoing facility available for families as children develop and their needs change.

The government is beginning to address this, promoting the use of joint care planning initiatives in health, education and social services for children's services that better incorporate and involve families. The National Children's Bureau is seeking that these joint initiatives allow greater access to children and are child-led. However, this research supports the conclusions of Grych and Fincham (1992) that interventions with children alone may be of limited effectiveness in most cases in terms of children's adjustment as

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<sup>24</sup> The author wishes to acknowledge the contribution of Gingerbread and other voluntary organisations who tirelessly work towards greater support of parents and children following PRB. These organisations can complement rather than replace access to more specialist clinical services.

responsibility for emotional containment must fall upon the whole family. Central to improving the post-PRB experience of children is the provision of readily accessible services that provide advice for parents and emotional and practical support.

## **18.2 Implications for Parents**

An important implication arising from this study for parents was that they should not assume that just because PRB appeared in the best interests of the family overall, that children will share that view (consistent with Mitchell, 1987). The impact of this is that parents need to acknowledge that children may experience PRB as a trauma and as such it will have long-term consequences that need addressing (Wallerstein, 1991). Parents' priority should be to ensure that children have the necessary support they need to manage their feelings and practical issues that may impact upon their ability to communicate with their child.

The children, other than those in the baby group (excluding Samantha), described separation from their NRP as a distressing event or events that had widely negative consequences upon their sense of self, including those children whose relationship with their NRP had already been tenuous. PRB can sometimes be overlooked as a factor still affecting children years afterwards, yet this study supports the findings of Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) that the emotional impact continues and needs recognition.

## **19. Suggestions for Future Research**

Qualitative methodology has proved a useful tool for more in-depth analysis of children's views and continues to be refined in its sensitivity to best facilitate children in their exploration of PRB issues and to meet important criteria for trustworthiness and

authenticity. The use of storytelling methods of interviewing proved a helpful means of beginning this process. Ideally, storytelling would be followed up with more in-depth exploration of the story once it has been captured in its entirety to enable greater use to be made of the generativity of the findings from this and future studies based upon storytelling methods. Future research is needed to examine transferability. A clinical sample may offer an opportunity to examine an alternative population using these methods.

Whilst the author did analyse the 'systemic' level of influence of parental interactions, there was insufficient space to present this. Further studies may clarify the children's perceptions of these interactions more specifically post-PRB and consider how they influence children's experiences.

## **20. Conclusion**

This study has confirmed that the experience of PRB for children is often shocking, traumatic and undermines their feelings of safety and security. The silence of parents about impending and subsequent PRB events contribute to this. PRB threatens to break the most precious ties that demonstrate love and meet fundamental needs. Children's own silence about PRB can lead to adults underestimating the importance of the departure of the NRP on children's lives and particularly, its influence on their view of themselves. This importance is disguised by children's varied coping strategies, and their sensitive respect for their parents' needs. Whilst it is often painful to listen to children's stories of PRB, it is clearly important for children to have their fundamental questions of: am I loved and held in mind by each parent? repeatedly answered in the affirmative by their parents' containing and sensitive responses.

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## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

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### **Definition of 'Parental Relationship Breakdown' (PRB)**

'PRB' encompasses the events of divorce, marital separation and separation of common-law partners, where one biological parent has separated from the other parent permanently due to relationship problems. This definition excludes a parent moving away for work or other temporary purpose, and parental death. Bereavement research suggests that parental death impacts on children's adjustment differently (Harrington and Harrison, 1999).

**Examples of Limitations of Previous Research**

Research Limitation	Description
<i>Atheoretical or minimal integrated and grounded psychological theory</i>	Much of the PRB literature is atheoretical or not integrated with other theory, limiting the degree to which a researcher can account for the psychological complexity of the family and the sequelae of PRB (author's observation).
<i>Sampling issues</i>	Most early studies were cross-sectional and used non-representative samples that were ill defined and clinical biasing the sample towards a more disturbed population (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999).
<i>Identification of variables</i>	Many studies failed to investigate significant mediating or moderating factors, for example, time since PRB (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999).
<i>Choice of measures</i>	Large sociological surveys have tended to rely upon limited, invalidated measures, whereas smaller studies have tended to use more sensitive measures but have not been consistent in the measures chosen, making comparison difficult (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999).
<i>Temporal and social contexts</i>	Most research predates the Children Act 1989. Relevance of old research is compromised by social changes such as PRB stigma and prevalence. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) and other non-UK studies have made major contributions to current understanding of children's experiences of PRB longitudinally. However, caution must be used in extrapolating findings from other cultures, even the US to UK families and PRB events.
<i>Flexibility, subtlety and detail</i>	Large cohort studies are able to measure very small effects, can control for confounding variables more easily than small qualitative studies but they lack the flexibility and subtlety to capture fully participants' views.
<i>Avoidance of bias and facilitation of openness</i>	All the studies that have attempted to obtain the child's perspective have done so using a researcher-led interview schedule (question and answer discourse, Riessman, 1993) increasing the likelihood of socially desirable responses. Factors such as interview privacy, tone and atmosphere affecting the degree of openness is not taken into account e.g. The Exeter Study enabled family members to come and go during the interview, whilst preconceived "sensitive questions were postponed until an appropriate time" (Cockett and Tripp, 1994, p80).
<i>Systematic analysis and validity</i>	It is unclear from reports on some research as to how interviews and analysis were performed e.g. Gorell Barnes and Dowling (1997). Without this, it is problematic for the reader to validate findings and compare them across studies which can lead to the introduction of additional and unnecessary confounding variables.

**Original Research Questions**

1. What events do children incorporate into their divorce narratives?
  - a) What events do children incorporate into their narrative to explain their post-divorce relationship with the non-resident parent?
  - b) What are children's understandings of the divorce events associated with the non-residential parent (e.g. orders of contact and residency)?
2. What messages about their relationship with the non-residential parent do children receive and use in their narrative(s) about the post-divorce family?
3. What changes in the quality of relationship with the non-resident parent does the child describe in their narrative of pre and post divorce periods?

**Arguments against respondent validation with children from a non-clinical sample**

There are more specific arguments against respondent validation with children.

1. Children's limited capacity to look at the interview material at a 'meta' level.
2. Ethically, there was some doubt about whether revisiting children at home was appropriate. Revisiting could bring an expectation in the child of ongoing researcher involvement that was neither feasible nor appropriate in a research context, with a non-clinical population.
3. Social desirability bias in children also calls into question the value of this approach.
4. The principle of interviewing was established by the author prior to interview that the child would feel heard and understood. Changing the language and embedded context of the child's story may detract from their feeling of being heard.
5. Reflecting back may be too exposing and become a form of intervention for which the author would require additional ethics approval, not obtainable within the time-scale of this research.
6. An important point made by Riessman (1993) regarding respondent validity is that "Individuals exclude experiences that undermine the current identities they wish to claim".



## **INTERVIEW FRAMEWORK**

### ***I. Introduction to Parent and Child***

- Make introductions depending on circumstances
- Build rapport and describe the purpose of the study
- Repeat the nature and extent of confidentiality, anonymity and consent
- Explain the interview process, opportunity for breaks and use of questionnaires
- Highlight debriefing and availability of follow up services

### ***II. Parent Interview Schedule***

- Introduction to semi-structured interview process
- Seek factual information about the PRB events and family circumstances
- Ask for their view of the nature of the information they think their child has received regarding the child's relationship with the non-resident parent
- Instructions about the questionnaires
- Answer any further queries
- Meanwhile child producing family drawing separately

### ***III. Child Interview Schedule***

- Putting the child at their ease
- Measure of mood
- The child's story of the events of PRB process
- Complete questionnaires together
- Meanwhile parent completing questionnaires separately

The child interview will attempt to elicit data relevant to the research questions although it will evolve according to the nature of data collected and the emerging theory but will continue to elicit information about the following basic themes:

- The child's story of the events of divorce.
- The child's story of the nature of the child's relationship with the non-resident parent (before, during and after divorce) including an explanation for the (in)frequency of visits and other contact.

### ***IV. Debrief***

## Family Interview Schedule

### I. Introduction to Parent and Child

- **Make introductions depending on circumstances**

- **Build rapport and describe the purpose of the study**

Thank you so much for letting me come and see you today.

I would like to start by going over what the study is about and then we could see if you have any outstanding questions. Does that sound OK?

#### **(Directed mostly at the child)**

The reason I am here is to find out about your understanding of your parent's divorce/separation and what's happened since then. This is really helpful to know because it helps adults know how to give information to children, to help children understand and make things less scary, worrying or confusing.

- **Repeat the nature and extent of anonymity, confidentiality and consent**

There are three things that are very important before we start:

**First**, you and your [mum][dad] can stop taking part at any time, you just have to say so. We can also stop for breaks if you are tired or bored.

The **second** thing is, you only have to say what you want to say. It is fine to leave things out if you prefer not to talk about something. Remember, nobody will know what it was that you said except you and me unless you want to tell someone afterwards, or if you say something that may suggest that you are in danger or I am worried about you, in which case we would need to tell your [mum][dad].

I will write up your story but change the names, places and things like that so nobody knows it was you who said it. It will be added to other children's stories who joined the study.

**Third**, I need to check it is OK to record our talk on this tape recorder. This helps me to remember what you and your [mum] [dad] have said and helps me when making some notes of it to read over later. I will keep the tape and my notes very safely locked up so only I can see them.

Is that all right?

Can I check is that OK for you too [parent]? I need you (parent) to sign this consent form which repeats what I have just said.

- **Explain the interview process and use of questionnaires**

So, do you have anything you want to ask me before we start? (*Answer any questions at this point*).

We need to turn on the tape recorder now so I can remember what you have told me. Do you want to help me? (*switch on tape-recorder*)

To start with, it would be nice to talk to your [mum] [dad] for a few minutes and I will ask you to draw a picture for me (more depending upon interviewing of siblings too). And then you and I can have a chat. If you are getting tired or bored then let me know and we can stop and have a break.

- **Highlight debriefing and availability of follow up services**

Then at the end, I will ask what it was like meeting today and if you or your [mum] [dad] want to talk a bit more or would like to meet someone else to talk about things, we can arrange that.

Now I am going to ask your [mum] [dad] some questions about the last couple of years and then I would like to talk to you.

I would really like you to do a drawing for me using these (pens or crayons or paints - *get permission from parent for use of paints if at home*). I would like you to do a picture of your family. Can you do that for me? Come back when you have finished. We will be finished in about 15 or 20 minutes. We will just be in the room next door.

**(Settle the child in an adjacent room, preferably supervised without interference)**

## **II. Parent Interview Schedule**

- **Introduction to semi-structured interview process**

Now, we are alone, are there any questions you would like to ask me or comments you want to make at this point? OK I will ask you again later just in case.

Now before I see [the child] I need to be clear about the issue of confidentiality. On the whole, everything your child says to me in the interview will remain anonymous as I mentioned earlier, that is to say, I will not pass on any information that is said to me in confidence that may identify your child. However, if a child says something that suggests they are in any danger of abuse or I am otherwise worried about their well-being, I will inform the parent and possibly be obliged to pass the information on to the relevant authorities. Is there anything you need to ask me regarding this?

Now, I would just like to spend about 15 minutes or so now asking you a few questions just to give me some background information. I will keep this fairly structured so as not to keep you too long as I know that there are probably more events than there will be time to cover today so maybe we can stick to the main ones affecting [child].

- **Seek factual information about the divorce events and family circumstances**

Can I start by asking:

1. Can you tell me briefly about the details of the divorce/separation? When was the decree absolute? Residency? Contact? Ancillary relief/finances? Children Act proceedings? Mediation?
2. How much of the process do you think [child] knows?

3. What have you told [child] about what's been happening?
4. Do you think [child] has information about it from any other source? If so, who? What?
5. Has [child] or other siblings needed additional help from children's services such as a youth counsellor or psychologist?

- **Ask for their view of the nature of the information they think their child has received regarding the child's relationship with the non-resident parent**

6. How much does [child] talk about his/her [dad] [mum]?
7. What is that like for you? Do you think you show how you feel?
8. Do you think [child] knows your views about your ex-[husband][wife] [partner]?
9. What was explained about why you broke up and why you live separately now?
10. How was residency and contact decided? How much say did [child] have?
11. How do you think [child] feels about the divorce/separation today?
12. What would you say [child]'s relationship is like with [his][her] [dad][mum]?
13. How has this changed?
14. How has [child] been coping with the divorce/separation events?
15. What helps when [child] feels low or worried?
16. What did he/she make of the prospect of talking to me?

- **Instructions about the questionnaire**

While I am interviewing [child] I would like you to fill in this questionnaire (*CBCL*) to provide me with a little extra background information and help me understand how [child] is coping generally.

- **Answer any further queries**

Do you have any further questions or things you need to mention now?

OK perhaps if we invite [child] back in and I can have a chat and then we can all get back together to talk about how it has gone.

### **III. Child Interview Schedule**

- **Putting the child at their ease**

So, your [mum][dad] and I have had a general chat and [he][she] will come in again when we have finished chatting. If you need a break, let me know but I will ask you if you want one later anyway. *(parent leaves)*

How did you get on with the picture? Can I see them? Hey, these are really interesting! Are you still happy to tell me about your parent's divorce/separation if I help you?

- **Measure of mood**

Before we start, I want to get an idea about how you feel right now about everything. Here are some pictures of faces of people. This one is very happy, this one is quite happy, this one is not really happy or unhappy, this one is quite unhappy and the last one is very unhappy. Point to the one most like you feel now.

- **The child's story of the events of divorce/separation.**

Now I would like to hear your story of your parents' divorce/separation and what things were like for you before then, in the middle of it and now. Perhaps you could tell me what it felt like for you and what you can remember happened including things that you may have picked up but don't quite understand or know. You can tell me what you have guessed happened too if you're not quite sure. Here there are no right or wrong answers, it is about what it is like for you.

Maybe your picture will help? Where does your story start?

Tell me what it was like?

I wonder what you noticed was happening?

What did you think?

What did that feel like?

What was that like for you?

Prompt: So if I had a video camera in your house then what would I have seen?

Prompt: I wonder what that felt like?

Prompt: Can you remember a time when [you felt][it was] like that?

Prompt: How did that happen, do you think?

What do you think [pet][person/friend] might have noticed?

- **The child's story of the nature of the child's relationship with the non-residential parent (before, during and after divorce/separation) including an explanation for the (in)frequency of visits and other contact.**

Tell me about this drawing of you and your [dad][mum].

Prompt: So how come it is like that now?

Prompt: [How was that] [Who] decided?

Prompt: What has this arrangement been like for you?

Prompt: What was that like?

Prompt: What do you think your [mum] [dad] think of the arrangement?

Prompt: What's different about how you get on with your [dad] [mum] now from before?

Prompt: What was life like with your [dad][mum] before? What's it like now?

What do your friends think?

How was your friend's situation different from yours?

Prompt: So what are the best bits and worst bits –can you tell me a story about these?

You look sad, is it OK to go on?

*Editing Option* Well, you have told me loads but is there anything else you feel you have left out that you want to say? Is there anything you would have rather not said and want me to leave out?

Before we stop I would like to ask you some particular questions about you and your family. Is that OK? Here goes. (*Present CFSEI-2*)

- **Debriefing**

You have been brilliant at telling your story.

You have told me lots of things. [Some things sounded like they were hard to talk about and may have made you feel sad.... It is OK to feel sad. All the changes you have been through recently are very hard to adjust to.]

I need to check how you are feeling about things before [I][you] leave today. I am going to show you those picture cards again. I would like you to point to the one that is most like how you feel now. [It looks like you are feeling .....]

*Debriefing according to clinical judgement.* What has it been like talking today? Can you think of two difficult things about it? Can you think of two good things about it?

Is there anything else you want to say while it is just you and me? (*discuss if necessary*)  
OK lets fetch your [mum][dad]. Oh, thank you for filling that in (*take questionnaires from parent*).

*Debriefing will depend on the response of the child and parent and if necessary it will involve directing the parent to specialist services for counselling.*

Discuss the option of additional help locally.

Thank you both so much for taking part. When the study is completed, would you like a copy of the summary of the findings? OK [I will arrange to send that to you]. Was there anything else you wanted to ask or say before we stop? Well then thanks again for your help and I wish you both all the best, it was really nice meeting and talking with you. You have my number if there are any queries don't you? *Goodbyes*

**Sampling Criteria - Initial and Revised**

**Initial**

1. Children aged between 8 and 12 years (inclusive) at interview.
2. Parents divorced more than one year ago and less than three years (two years ago maximum if only 8 years old at time of interview)
3. Participating parent should have sole or joint rights of residency for the child.
4. Child must not be receiving or have recently received formal psychological assessment or treatment concerning problems related to PRB. (Excluded from this category were school social skills groups and social work involvement due to behaviour problems where the child did not directly address the issue of PRB).
5. Recruitment must not be through a 'clinical' source.
6. There must be no legal proceedings currently actioned or pending concerning the child.

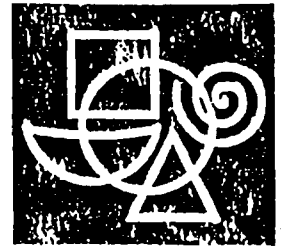
**Revised (in addition to the above)**

7. Parents could have been married and divorced or separated, or unmarried and separated on a permanent basis (that is, not due to work or trial separation).
8. Children whose parents PRB took place over three years prior to interview.

Salomons Centre  
David Salomons Estate  
Broomhill Road, Southborough  
TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
Kent TN3 0TG

Telephone: 01892 515152  
Facsimile: 01892 539102

Our Ref: L17075  
Direct Fax: 01892 518446  
E-mail: L.thompson@salomons.org.uk



SALOMONS  
CENTRE

19<sup>th</sup> November 1998

Dear

**Re: Ethics Approval – Children's narratives of the divorce process and their relationship with the non-resident parent**

Thank you for sending the above proposal for Ethics Approval. The Panel has considered your application and Provisional Approval is given. The Panel were very impressed with the care that had been taken to take into account the ethical issues in a potentially ethically fraught area. For Full Approval we would want you to take the following points taken into account:

1. The completion of the child interview and questionnaires is likely to be a lengthy procedure and attention should be paid to:
  - (a) the issue of informing parents and the children of the likely length of the interview in advance, and
  - (b) how, or if, breaks should be built into the interview procedure with the child.
2. In the main text the researcher is cautious about the extent to which complete confidentiality can be guaranteed. This is appropriate but should be extended to consideration of the possibility of a disclosure in the child interview which may require the researcher to report the matter beyond the parent. It is acknowledged that it is unlikely that children who are being abused will be put forward for the project, but this is a possibility. Given this the researcher should consider how such a situation would be managed.
3. Great care was taken to explain what would happen to the tapes (i.e. they would be destroyed) however, there was no information about what would happen to the transcriptions.
4. It appeared that it was not planned to give the children feedback and consideration should be given about whether it would be appropriate to do so.
5. If LEA require formal submissions for ethical approval the Salomons Panel should not be seen as a substitute for those processes and procedures.



It was hoped that these five conditions would be relatively easy to meet and providing you met these, the Panel foresaw no problems granting full approval. The Panel wishes the researcher to address these issues in a letter to the Chair who can take the decision to give Full Approval.

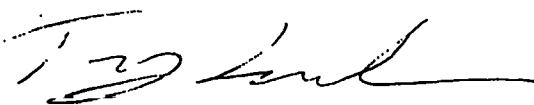
The Panel was very interested in the study and made a number of other observations which may be of interest.

1. Some of the phrases in the interview schedules, for example, "Now, we are alone, ..." and "You have been brilliant at telling a story" could come across in a way that were not intended by the researcher. Thus with the latter expression, if the child had not been very good and realised it, this may come across as unguine. It is assumed that the researcher will not keep slavishly to the wording specified but the Panel thought it worth advising flexibility in response.
2. It seemed a very broad trawl of schools was being made and it was not made clear how specific schools would be selected, or why it was necessary to have such a wide geographical area to recruit 15/20 participants.
3. In Appendix 2, second paragraph, there was no mention of asking about emotional responses or feelings and the Panel wondered if this had been intentionally omitted.
4. It was acknowledged that the child interview is likely to be significantly affected if the parent sits in, but the Panel wondered whether, if this occurred in a significant number of cases, how the author would manage this possibility.
5. The Panel was a little confused as all the parents will be divorced (decree absolute) why in the Appendix 2, Parent Interview, (paragraph 2) the parent is asked "how far along the divorce process are you?".
6. It was not clear if the pictures that the child will draw while the parent is being interviewed will be used in the study.

The above points do not require a response but perhaps some discussion with your supervisor.

We look forward to seeing the results and hope you enjoy the research.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Tony Lavender  
Chair of Ethics Panel

c.c. Caroline Hogg  
Nigel Armstrong

Salomons Centre  
David Salomons Estate  
Broomhill Road, Southborough  
TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
Kent TN3 0TG

Telephone: 01892 515152  
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Our Ref: LT/075  
Direct Fax: 01892 518446  
E-mail: l.thompson@salomons.org.uk



SALOMONS  
CENTRE

7<sup>th</sup> January 1999

Dear

**Re: Ethics Approval – Children's narratives of the divorce process and their relationship with the non-resident parent**

Thank you for your letter of 29<sup>th</sup> December 1998.

The two issues that you detail in your letter do not appear to raise any new ethical issues that you had not already considered in your original proposal. When placing adverts in the paper it is, however, wise not to use a home or traceable phone number.

I hope the work proceeds well and that the new plans help recruitment.

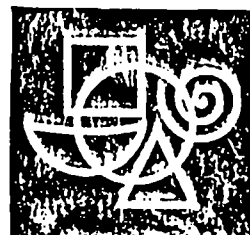
Yours sincerely,

Professor Tony Lavender  
Chair of Ethics Panel

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E-mail: l.thompson@salomons.org.uk



SALOMONS  
CENTRE

27<sup>th</sup> January 1999

Dear

**Re: Ethics Approval – Children's narratives of the divorce process and their relationship with the non-resident parent**

Thank you for your letter dated 25<sup>th</sup> October 1999, with enclosures. I am assuming that this is a typing error and that the date should be 25<sup>th</sup> January 1999.

The amendment relating to the issue of parental consent appears to have been well thought through and, in fact, the Panel felt that this amendment improves the study in respect of ethical considerations. Full Ethical Approval is granted for this amendment.

I hope the recruitment of participants through the solicitors proceeds well.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Tony Lavender  
Chair of Ethics Panel



23 February 1999

Direct line 01892 507668  
Direct fax 01892 507660  
E-mail l.thompson@salomons.org.uk  
Our Ref LT

Dear

**Re: Ethics Approval – Children's narratives of the divorce process and their relationship with the non-resident parent**

Thank you for your letter dated 18 February 1999, with enclosures. Having considered the contents of your letter and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ethics Committee Proposal, I am pleased to give Chair's Approval for these changes to your research.

I was sorry to hear about the recruitment difficulties but trust your new plan will overcome these.

Yours sincerely,

**Professor Tony Lavender**  
**Chair of Ethics Panel**



22 March 1999

Direct line 01892 507668  
Direct fax 01892 507660  
E-mail l.thompson@salomons.org.uk  
Our Ref LT

Dear

**Re: Ethics Approval – Children's narratives of the divorce process and their relationship with the non-resident parent**

Thank you for your letter dated 15 March 1999, received 22 March 1999. After consideration of the contents of your letter I am pleased to give Chair's Approval for these changes to your research.

I wish you well with this research and I hope that these new recruitment methods help with recruitment difficulties.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Tony Lavender  
Chair of Ethics Panel

COUNTY COUNCIL

CARING COUNTYWIDE

Education Department

Pupil Services

Telephone:

Fax:

Chief Education Officer

My reference

Your reference

Date 30 December 1998

This matter is being dealt with by

Direct line:

Dear

Thank you for your letter dated 7 December, 1998. I have now received advice from Education Officers within the Department and there is no objection to maintained schools participating in your research. It has been suggested that the Headteachers of the following schools could be approached, although you can contact others if you wish.

Mrs

CP School

M

CE School  
Road

Mrs

The

School

A copy of our schools list is enclosed.

Yours sincerely

Principal/Administrative Officer



recycled paper



Tel:  
Fax:

COUNTY COUNCIL  
Education

Psychologist in Clinical Training

County Hall

3 August 1999

Dear :

Re: Study of children's stories of the divorce process and their relationship  
with the non-resident parent

I refer to our telephone conversation on the 3 December 1998, your letter dated 4 December and your conversation with my Personal Assistant, , yesterday.

I confirm that I gave you the necessary approval regarding your study when we spoke on the 3 December 1998. This letter confirms in writing that approval.

Best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Principal Education Welfare Manager

Director of Education  
Paul G...

**Letter to Head Teacher**

Ms [       ]  
Headteacher  
[       ] School  
[       ] Road

Monday 11 January 1999

Dear Ms [       ]

**Re: Study of children's stories of the divorce process.**

Further to our telephone conversation last Thursday, I am writing with more details about the above study. In order to minimise the amount you need to read, I have clarified the main points of the enclosed research proposal below.

1.     The research has *full ethical approval* from the Salomon's Ethics Committee (confirmation letter enclosed).
2.     The *purpose of the study* is to increase our understanding of how children make sense of divorce. There is a dearth of literature on children's narratives about divorce despite narratives being a rich source of information that could inform and improve services to minimise children's distress during and after divorce.
3.     *The Researcher:* I have professional experience as an NHS employed psychologist (studying for my doctorate in clinical psychology) and as a qualified solicitor with an interest in family law.
4.     *Your school's involvement:*
  - To place two Information Posters on public view and make available Information Sheets to take away incorporating reply slips (and pre-paid envelopes; all enclosed). Alternatively, if there is nowhere to put the Information Sheets, there is a telephone number on the posters for parents to call.
  - You suggested placing a notice in the school newsletter. A notice may be very helpful, as I know many parents do not come into school regularly. A suggested notice is enclosed.

This would be the end of your school's involvement in the study. However, a full written report will be produced and a research summary will be available to participating parties.

If you have any questions or comments, please telephone me on [       ] or write to me at the above address. In any event, I will call you in the next few weeks to make sure that you received this letter and to check whether you need more materials.



**Thank you so much for agreeing to assist in the advertising of this, hopefully interesting, new research.**

Yours sincerely

**Psychologist in Clinical Training, supervised by [ ], Research Supervisor**

## Suggested Newsletter Notice

### **RESEARCH ON CHILDREN'S STORIES OF DIVORCE**

[ ] is an NHS psychologist and qualified solicitor with an interest in children's experiences of divorce events. She is undertaking doctorate clinical research that offers a chance for children (aged 8-12) and their resident parent to describe their experiences of divorce privately and anonymously at a time and place of their choice. A brief interview would be conducted by [ ] in a child-led, non-judgemental manner. This is a sensitive area of research thus full ethical committee approval has been obtained (that means, interviewing will include safeguards to minimise and manage any possible distress). *Would you and your child be willing to contribute to this necessary research aimed at finding out more about children's divorce experiences and hopefully helping to inform and improve future children's services?*

For more information call [ ] on [ ] and look out for information on school notice boards. (Closing date for participation: late March 1999)

*Could you and your child  
spare a little time  
to contribute to*  
**IMPORTANT NEW RESEARCH**  
**into:**  
**CHILDREN'S  
STORIES OF  
DIVORCE?**

- \* For parents and children aged 8-12 years
- \* Brief anonymous interview at your convenience
- \* NHS psychologist/researcher sensitive, non-directive, non-judgemental and experienced in working with children
- \* Full Ethics Committee Approval

If you would like more information, please contact

on: (you can be called straight back)  
or take an Information Sheet

*Your contribution to this much-needed yet very sensitive area of research would be valued!*

## PARTICIPANTS WANTED to help with research into Children's Understanding of Divorce

### ***Aims of the Study***

The divorce process is often complicated and painful. It is difficult to know how much to tell children or how well they understand what has happened. There is some research looking at how children are affected by divorce but few researchers have asked children about their own view or 'story' of their experiences. Through the tradition of storytelling, a medium children are familiar with, children participating in this study can express themselves freely, in a 'child-led', non-judgmental and anonymous interview. It is hoped that from this study, professionals and parents may be given more guidance on how to help children manage information they receive about divorce and to reduce the anxiety surrounding divorce events.

### ***Despite this area of research being sensitive, there are a number of benefits for participants:***

- Giving children the opportunity to talk about their experiences is increasingly being recognised as being beneficial to their later emotional adjustment. The brief interview would be strictly anonymous, private and at your convenience.
- Parents can find the opportunity to talk about their experiences of parenting their children through the divorce/separation both supportive and empowering.
- After interviewing, there will be time to debrief. General feedback about the interview can help reassure or enlighten parents about their child's adjustment to the divorce events. Information about local services will be available to those interested in talking further.
- This is an opportunity to contribute to a valuable new area of research aimed at helping children and families in the future to cope with divorce.
- You and your child will have the option to receive research summaries, setting out the main findings of the study, its conclusions and recommendations.

### ***Who can take part?***

- Children aged between 8 and 12 years old whose parents have been divorced and/or living separately for more than a year
- A parent of the child participant who has rights of residency
- There must be no ongoing litigation regarding your child
- Both child and parent must want to take part

To find out more call [ ] on [ ].  
(Last interviews: late April 1999).

## **Reply Slip**

**My child and I would be interested in \*[taking part in the study] \*[knowing more about the study].**

**Please contact me by \*[letter] \*[telephone].**

<i>Your name:</i>	
<i>Your child's name*:</i>	
<i>Address for Correspondence*:</i>	
<i>Telephone number(s)*:</i>	

*( \* please delete/amend as appropriate)*

*Please post in the pre-paid envelope that is addressed to:*

**Thank you for your interest and I hope you will take part in this much-needed research!**

**Letter from Solicitors to Potential Participating Parents**

Dear .....

**INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY**

**Title: Study of children's stories of the divorce process and their relationship with the non-resident parent**

[ ]'s Solicitors wishes to support relevant research that it feels could contribute to the improvement and development of good professional practice for supporting families through difficult life events such as divorce and separation.

[ ], a clinical psychologist in training (and a qualified solicitor) with a particular interest in children's experiences of divorce, has asked us to pass on information about her study to potential participants (children and parents). (Your name and details have not been passed on to [ ]).

The study aims to develop a better understanding of how children make sense of the many confusing legal and family events often associated with divorce. Research has shown that by creating a coherent and balanced story of events can improve children's emotional adjustment to divorce events. By understanding how children make use of information about the divorce process, professionals and parents can be better informed about how to share information with children and to support them to develop a constructive, coherent story of the divorce process.

Child and parent participants will be interviewed once and asked to complete some questionnaires with [ ]. The interview will be supportive, neutral/non-judgmental and anonymous, and time will be set aside to debrief after the interview. Further details of this study are given in the enclosed Information Sheet. If you and your child would like to find out more about the study or wish to take part, please complete the reply slip at the bottom of the Information Sheet and return it to [ ] in the enclosed pre-paid envelope.

We hope that you will take this opportunity to participate in this interesting and potentially enlightening study.

Yours faithfully

[ ]'s Solicitors

## **Additional Letter to Non-Resident Parent**

Dear [Mr .....] [Mrs .....]

### **Re: Study of children's stories of the divorce process**

Your [son] [daughter] has recently expressed an interest in participating in some important new research investigating children's stories of divorce. Of course, in order to take part in the study it is essential to obtain your parental consent.

This is a new and very important area of research that could potentially improve the provision of services for children going through divorce. However, it is recognised that it is also a sensitive area that requires very careful interviewing. The interviewer/researcher is a NHS psychologist with experience of working with children and families. Every attempt has been made to safeguard children's welfare and the research has *full ethics committee approval*. Safeguards will include keeping the interview non-judgemental and child-led (enabling the child to say as little or as much as they like). There will be time to debrief (to check the child is not distressed following the interview) and information will be available about local counselling services if children would like to talk further about issues they raise.

Enclosed is an information sheet explaining the rationale of the study and a flow chart showing the nature of your child's potential involvement. It is important to stress that all names, dates and any other identifying information will be changed to *protect confidentiality* and ensure your child's involvement is *strictly anonymous*.

Information provided by child participants in interview will not generally be shared with parents. This is to enable children to speak as freely as they wish. The only exception to this is if a participant indicates that he/she is at risk of harm. As a healthcare professional and researcher, in these prescribed circumstances, I would be obliged to pass on this information to both parents and, if appropriate, then to relevant authorities.

On completion of the study, research summaries will be offered to all parents and a simplified version to participating children.

If you are willing for your child to take part in this research, please complete the enclosed consent form and return it in the pre-paid envelope provided. However, if you need any additional information about this study, please do not hesitate to call me on [ ] and I will be delighted to answer any questions and/or send you further information. Your child's contribution to this much-needed area of research will be valuable and much appreciated.

Yours sincerely

(Researcher/Psychologist in clinical training)

THE ADVERTISER, JANUARY 22, 1999

ages negotiable  
1784 471466

**Engineering  
nibly Workers**  
quired for  
lum window and  
manufacturer in  
ing. Call Neil on  
83 418622  
pplication form.

son required for tight en-  
k, O and A levels not nec-  
must know left hand from  
to be agreed. Tel 01483  
contact Mr John Jordan.



Club Welcomes  
of our members.



**VOLUNTEERS** wanted to take part in child psychology research about childrens stories of divorce. Chance for children (aged 8-12) and their resident parent to describe experience of divorce privately and anonymously at a time and place of their choice. Interviews will be conducted by a friendly, non judgmental psychologist/researcher with considerable professional experience interviewing children and families. This clinical doctorate research has full ethical committee approval. For more information call

**WALTERS.** Do you know a gentleman named Robert Walters (born between 1907-18) living in the Woking area in 1945+. He possibly married a girl called Audrey whose father was in the garage business. If you have any information I will be grateful to hear from



**Letter to Parents enclosing further details and letter to child**

# FLOW CHART OF THIS STUDY

STEP 1\*

\* steps needing your time

You have just received:  
**INFORMATION SHEET, LETTERS AND FLOW CHARTS.**

STEP 2 \*

I have answered some of your questions and we have  
arranged a time to talk:  
**Wednesday 31 March 1999 at 4.15pm**  
**At your home**

STEP 3 \*

**THE INTERVIEW** (neutral and anonymous)

**INTRODUCTIONS** – I will introduce myself to you and  
Arnie and repeat the purpose of the study.  
(Approx. 5-10 mins)

**PARENT INTERVIEW** – You and I will meet alone. I will  
ask some questions for background information. You will  
be encouraged to ask any questions about the study.

Meanwhile, Arnie will be asked to draw  
some family pictures. (Approx. 15-20 mins)

**CHILD INTERVIEW** – Arnie and I will meet to talk and to  
complete a questionnaire.  
Meanwhile, I will ask you to complete a simple  
questionnaire about Arnie.  
(No minimum to maximum, one hour plus breaks)

**DEBRIEF** – At the end of the interviews we will join  
together again to talk about the experience  
of doing the interview (not the content of the interview).

(if you feel further time is needed to talk, I will direct you  
to suitable counselling services). (Timed according to need)

STEP 4

Interviews will be transcribed and analysed.  
(Names etc will be changed to keep interviews **totally anonymous**)  
**CONCLUSIONS** will be reported and summarised for  
professionals, parents and children.

STEP 5

**RESEARCH SUMMARIES** available for you and Arnie

22 March 1999

Dear Arnie

**Study of children's stories about divorce.**

It is really great that you are interested in taking part in this study.

Telling your story of your parents getting divorced will be very helpful for people working with children, parents getting divorced and other children like you.

Your story will help us to understand what children like you, whose parents get divorced, think and feel about it. This helps us know what children want and need.

The study will be interesting but may also bring sad feelings too. You can use pictures and tell the story of what happened when your parents divorced. I will help you by asking simple questions.

Your story will be recorded and written down but the names and places in your story will be changed so nobody will know it was your story. At the end of the study, you can have a *research summary* saying what we found out from doing the study.

With this letter is a chart that shows you how the study works and what you will do. If you have any questions or comments I will be happy to answer them when we meet or your dad can ask me on the phone.

I am looking forward to meeting you on 31 March.

Best Wishes

# ARNIE'S CHART

Thank you for helping with my study



I have answered some questions your dad had and arranged to meet you and your dad at your home on Wednesday 31 March at 4.15



On Wednesday, I will meet you and your dad for a few minutes to tell you both about the study and then....



Your dad and I will talk on our own for a bit so I can ask your dad some questions to help me get to know your family better.  
I will ask you to draw some family pictures for a few minutes.



Then....You and I can talk together so you can tell me about what you remember about your parents' divorce. We can have a break in the middle if you like.  
We will then fill in a questionnaire together...  
While your dad fills in different questionnaire on his own.



Then the last thing we will do is..... Talk together about what it was like doing the study to check you and your dad feel OK.  
We will not talk about what you said!  
(If you feel you want to talk some more, I can tell you and your dad where to go for more time to talk).  
....Goodbye....



After our chat, I will write down your story but change the names and places so nobody knows it's your story. When I have finished this study, I can send you some information (if you want it) about what I found out about what divorce was like for other people of your age.

**Four Components of Self Esteem used in the CFSEI-2**

General Self Esteem is the aspect of self esteem that refers to individuals' overall perceptions of their worth.

Social Self Esteem is the aspect of self esteem that refers to individuals' perceptions of the quality of their relationships with peers.

Academic Self Esteem (i.e. school-related self esteem) is the aspect of self-esteem that refers to individuals' perceptions of their ability to succeed academically.

Parent-Related Self Esteem is the aspect of self esteem that refers to individuals' perceptions of their status at home – including their subjective perceptions of how their parents or parent-surrogates view them.

(Battle, 1981, 1992, p3)

**PARENTAL CONSENT FORM**

I am the parent of the child named below.

I have been informed of the purpose of this study of children's stories of divorce.

I am willing for my child and I to be interviewed by [       ] and for the interview to be recorded on audio-tape, subject to the following conditions:

1. That my child and I can withdraw from this study at any time.
2. That the audio-tape will be stopped if my child or I request and any part of the recording will be erased at our request.
3. The audio-tape and transcript will be securely stored and access will be restricted to [                      ] only.
4. The recording and transcript may only be used for the purposes of this study.
5. In any event, the audio-tape recording will be destroyed within 6 months of completion of the study.
6. Names, places and any other facts that may make the interview / stories identifiable to others as originating from my child or me will be changed or removed to protect the privacy of my child and I.

I sign my name below to confirm my consent to the above statements.

Parent's Signature .....

Date .....

Child's Name .....

### **Glossary of Terms for Narrative Analysis**

For the purpose of this study the following terms were operationalised as follows:

**'Story'** – the everyday meaning of this word is intended but the word is also used to label the child's PRB 'story' in its entirety, that is the product from the participants' point of view of the main part of the interview itself.

**'Narrative'** – characterised by at least some of Labov's (1972, 1982) elements of a narrative, this is the child's spontaneous description (whole or in part) of an experience or event culminating in a particular 'message' the child wishes to orally and/or pictorially present.

**'Message'** – the underlying meaning that the child is attempting to communicate to the listener, explicitly or implicitly through the discourse. A message can arise from any form of discourse.

**'Question and answer discourse'** (Q&A)– this comprises a question and answer exchange between child and researcher *usually* initiated by the author.

**'Sidetracking'** – this can be question and answer discourse or narrative that has been moved entirely off the point by a child e.g. discussing the cat entering the room or by the author introducing a topic outside of the child's overall story.

**'Other discourse'** – this is a 'dustbin category' for any discourse that did not fit into the other three forms of discourse e.g. introducing the mood measures, debriefing etc.

## **ANALYTIC CATEGORIES**

### **Purposes:**

1. To reduce the data down to the core structure to inform on the child's meaning of the event/experience
2. To provide a structure that highlights the following:
  - a) protagonists
  - b) context
  - c) temporal qualities of event/experience
  - d) child's view/meaning of event/experience at time
  - e) child's view/meaning of event/experience now
  - f) consequences or resolution of event/experience
  - g) nature of event
3. Achieve a summation of the meaning of the event preferably using the child's own words

### **Glossary of Terms**

**Event** - an external occurrence of some sort, actual or fictional, related from the child's perspective to an aspect of PRB that had some practical impact on the child.

**Experience** - an internal occurrence of some sort, actual or fictional, related from the child's perspective to an aspect of PRB that had some impact on the child.

The methodology was originally based upon Labov's (1982) method of narrative analysis, however, his structure failed to capture all the elements of the data of interest to the researcher and thus Labov's categories of abstract, orientation, complicating action, resolution, coda and evaluation were revised.



### **New categories:**

*Abstract* This is a guiding statement or question giving some guidance as to what is to follow but not necessarily equivalent to the point of the narrative. In some instances this will resemble Labov's abstract by "creating some focus of attention from which the narrative's point may be elaborated" (Viney and Bousfield, 1991, p758) but can include the researcher's question if this was the only apparent trigger for the narrative.

*Orientation* This statement informs the listener/reader of who is involved, some of their personal details (age, status) and also the physical, social and emotional context. This will include the inciting conditions (Riessman, 1993). Orientation information will occasionally be tightly incorporated into other parts of the narrative making it difficult to separate it out, in these instances the researcher has left the text intact so as not to complicate the analysis unnecessarily.

*Complicating Action* This is the active part of the text describing the activity of the event/experience being told. The activity can be actual or hypothetical and is used broadly here to mean things people are doing, thinking and feeling at either a moment in time i.e. a temporal occurrence or on an ongoing or repeated basis i.e. an habitual occurrence. The latter differs from the general understanding of Labov's definition as Labov required the event to be in the past at a particular discrete moment in time. As many of the events associated with PRB described by the children are often recurring, such as visits, domestic violence, parental fights, Labov's definition was insufficient for the present purpose. The terms 'temporal' and 'habitual' shall be used to make the distinction.

*Resolution* This statement is consistent with Labov's definition, stating what finally happens in the narrative (or some sub-plot in the narrative). Very often this will be absent, particularly where the event/experience is habitual.

*Coda* This is a statement that brings the listener/reader into the present, in the case of temporally situated narratives.

*Evaluation* Labov uses this to denote the statements where the narrator is describing the point of the narrative, of what they are trying to show and/or how they feel about it. Children generally find this difficult to achieve and a much looser definition will be used of children merely explaining what they think or feel about the content of the narrative in the present. Evaluations made by the child in the past form part of the complicating action and are not distinguished.

### **Defining the boundaries of a narrative**

The point at which a narrative begins and ends is open to debate but it is recognised that this point can "profoundly alter its shape and meaning" (Riessman, 1993, p18) and so this point is clearly defined. A distinction is made between multiple complicating actions culminating in a singular stated or suggested resolution (one narrative) and quite separate complicating actions which culminate in separate resolutions or remain unresolved and there is no suggestion of a linking evaluation (two narratives). Very often this tight definition will leave narratives appearing incomplete in that they do not neatly have an orientation or resolution. This is intentional as the priority is to see the level of completeness and coherence of children's stories as a whole. Often the particular theme

or story is started in an earlier narrative in the text and completed in a later one. Only when they are considered in their entirety is this appreciated, hence the value of this holistic narrative methodology.

### **Editing Decisions**

Some researchers feel strongly that the text should remain in its entirety to be analysed, others such as Bell (1988) cut drastically to obtain the essence of what was being said. As children tend to be verbose in their narratives or say very little outside question and answer it was decided that Bell's approach would be used to collapse the narratives into their essence to identify what is and is not presented by the child that can answer the research questions as they evolved through the study.

In order to decide upon editing, the text is listened to and read repeatedly and every word is considered in its context. The question asked is what is the child trying to tell me here? (using Goffman's (1959) assumption that the teller is performing for the listener to share something of value with them). Generally, the child's link or a higher or theoretical link clarifies the status of the word or phrase as relevant or irrelevant to the essence of the narrative. Where in doubt, the narrative is left in until the initial analysis of the whole transcript is complete and patterns and themes and segments of stories become apparent.

Sample Original and Analysed TranscriptExtract of Original Transcript

- 070 R Do you remember playing games with daddy?
- 071 C Yeah. Daddy left it back here, I think we've still got  
072 it up on the back shelf.
- 073 R Why do you think he left it here?
- 074 C Um. Probably because he had no need of it, he  
075 doesn't have a paddling pool at his house and it's not a very big  
076 space. And he might not need it when he's mostly on his own,  
077 so he thought he would leave it behind so we can still play with  
078 it. In the summer time.
- 079 R Where does your story go next? You told me a bit  
080 about when you found out about what happened.
- 081 C Well he, this is a bit forward on and then I go back,  
082 because he gave them this rose and it's really pretty and he  
083 planted it in the corner of his front garden. It's a red rose. Yeah,  
084 that's really nice and we give him presents when it's his  
085 birthday. I got my *brand, new* bike, its out in the shed, it's still  
086 new. It's a Dawes one, and it's pink and sparkley and was *a lot*  
087 of money anyway, took a lot of trouble to get for me, and I said  
088 "daddy it's *a lot* of money, I thought you said you can't afford that  
089 sort of stuff". He said: "money doesn't matter as long as you like  
090 it". [Voice proud and impressed] Yeah, he bought me that!
- 091 R And what you think about that, about him getting  
092 that?
- 093 C It's really kind, because he doesn't have much  
094 money and mummy said he's got lots of money and then daddy  
095 says she's got lots of money, and mum says we've got to start  
096 cutting down on sweets, toys and the usual treats every day  
097 kids get. So now we only get sweets, or most of the time, we  
098 get sweets if we get ten out of 10 in our spelling. And dad said  
099 she's got a lot of money, she took most of it and mum says he's  
100 got a lot of money and he's got most of it. I don't know who  
101 to believe because they keep on saying that.
- 102 R So how does that leave you feeling?
- .....

## Analysed Transcript

**Narrative 6**      I got my brand new bike.... Yeah, he bought me that!

### **Abstract**

079      R      Where does your story go next?

### **Temporal Complicating Action 1**

085      I got my *brand, new* bike

### **Orientation**

086      it's pink and ... was *a lot*  
087      of money.....,

### **Evaluation**

087      took a lot of trouble getting it for me,

### **Temporal Complicating Action 2**

087      and I said:  
088      "daddy it's a lot of money, I thought you said you can't afford that  
089      sort of stuff". He said: "money doesn't matter as long as you like  
090      it". [voice sounded proud and impressed].

### **Resolution/Coda**

090      Yeah, he bought me that!

**Notes:**      This appeared to be C evidencing her dad's physical affirmation of his love for her, a sign that was highly significant for her. However, she also takes responsibility for his wellbeing re: finances and it is not until the next few narratives that we also start to see how C's interpretation of truth may at some level negate the intention behind her daddy's gesture.

*Italics shows Rebecca's emphasis*

Purpose of Research Diary

1. To orient the reader to the theoretical and other influences upon the researcher's thinking.
2. To highlight some of the methodological challenges of the research process that may have impacted upon the findings.

For the sake of brevity (as this became a substantial document), only selected extracts of the diary are presented below.

Extracts from the researcher's diary

30.3.98

Spoke to Rudi Dallos recently about divorce topic and possibility of supervision. He recommended starting with Wallerstein and Kelly (1980). Finished reading it today – old but very good!

4.4.98

I would really like to do some research into attachment issues.

10.4.98

Decided to go ahead with divorce and particularly look at the relationship issues with non-resident parent (NRP). Wallerstein (1991) said children's experiences of PRB is not really understood that well and I haven't found much research on children's side of the story. Also of course, it is an issue close to my heart as my dad left and I lost contact.

2.6.98

Met with Hilton Davies blew my mind where to start but inspiring too. Discussed personal constructs and rep grids (Kelly, 1955).

20.6.98

Been reading about narratives and looked Gorell Barnes and Dowling (1997) – methodology unclear and clinical sample used – quite different from my interest but ideas of stories interesting. Want something even more child friendly – play and art work like Wallerstein?

19.8.98

Meeting at Salomons - Most important issue that came up was analysis. Shall I use narrative analysis too? Need to go away and find out more about it but it seems to fit quite nicely in terms of my aims of the study – to understand kids' stories and how they construct them, not what children are supposed to know or not know i.e. what have they been told - facts have different meanings for confused children than confused adults/parents/lawyers etc.

20.8.98

I am becoming aware of the limitations of this study. Will I be able to see enough kids to reach theoretical "saturation"? ... I am still waiting for The Law Society to get back to me on ethics stuff.

I am now very excited with the research having just spoken to Martin Cortazzi whose analysis of research methods was rather eye opening. I did not realise how narrow a view of research I had up to this point!

31.10.98

[ ]'s solicitors seem fairly happy with proposal but would like some sort of letter to introduce the research project to their clients – they wanted two versions one to NRP as they need to have consent from both. Already discussed this issue generally and decided untenable for whole sample but agree for [ ]'s sample.

Today I finally got off the Ethics Committee research proposal. There are still a few areas of concern to me. I am still not sure my Info. Sheets/Poster really sells the project to parents or children. I am also concerned about the length of questionnaire – will an eight-year-old really co-operate for this long? What am I expecting them to produce – I guess I am beginning to feel the story may well be brief, bitty, and

require more direction than I would like. Also I am predicting that interviewing in the parental home could well make the child's account aligned/biased to that participating parent but I see little option as parents are unlikely to want to travel anywhere.

...My view now of what is different about this study is perhaps:- I am interested in a non-clinical sample of children who have probably not told their story much and have multiple stories to tell. The idea is that by leaving the child to describe their story, particular events and fantasy might arise to explain events and their relationship with the NRP. Do I need to operationalise relationship or is this actually what will come out i.e. a meaning of relationship for child? What meanings do events have to the child?

4.12.98

Met with Len Rowland – very helpful to think about structuring the interview into spontaneous and structural parts and categories assured to direct interview.

31.12.98

Reading Kim Sandler & Tein (1997) again confirms the validity for me of doing my research suggesting as it does that attribution of events of divorce is important especially when attributing psychological symptoms. Therefore finding out through grounded theory methods what events were significant for children seems another way of tackling this issue without the restriction of a theoretical attributional model of locus of control beliefs. This study looked at the same age-group as me (8-12) although it is a US study it appears very useful to bear in mind in my study.

It is difficult to know when to stop reading literature on "custody" matters (residence and contact now) and how much to use US studies which are much more common than UK studies.

5.1.99

Met with 'JA' (family solicitor) and discussed divorce law and mediation procedure. Finally sent adverts to [ ] Advertiser and [ ] Times and [ ] Star for this week.

Reading Spigelman et al. (1992) reminded me how much the findings from my study will only represent a moment in time. That children were having very different experiences at separation compared to after the divorce when conflict is resolved. How real is my study going to be? Will children be able to give me a sense of their possible early angst and will it persist. It made me question the value of the research limited by so many unhelpful variables such as timing, venue, volunteer bias etc. The instructions used in the study raised the issue of whether I shall ask the participants to draw a family or their family – what would be the impact of the latter and is there any data to compare the results with. Is it still projective?

6.1.99

I was interested to read the article by Krakauer (1992) today but I found myself feeling less and less convinced that "children of divorce" of 20 years ago are the same as those today. Things were so different in my childhood to now. Having said this, the research suggesting premature maturity (Weiss, 1979) and feelings of abandonment and anger (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1976) are still likely to apply. But the theme of isolation may be less common than when Mitchell (1987) reported the theme.

18.1.99

Telephoned around schools in [ ] area. I am aware I am neither random nor systematic in my choice. I am merely going through all the list of schools LEA gave me choosing by whether they:

- 1) answer
- 2) agree I can speak to Head or pass message
- 3) have possible children e.g. not RC strict

Some head teachers have been really encouraging and others have been totally against talking to children. I have had a similar reaction from professionals like [ ] who takes the attitude that children are so vulnerable that they should only be talked to in a clinical situation. I find this bizarre as these children are living with their experiences everyday and exposed to questioning from peers and other people about their circumstances in a far less sensitive way than my interview would be and without the elaborate safeguards of ethics, debriefing, supervision etc. It is interesting that there appears to be a gut reaction surrounding this issue as people generally are either in favour or against. The most frustrating thing is that they decide

this invariably before I have told them about my study.

#### 5.2.99

Today in our research seminar people talking made me realise the crux of the research is about "meanings" and the interaction between this and interpersonal relationships... Meeting left many questions in my mind about how to research meaning.

#### 15.2.99

Now that I have interviewed my first participants I have seen several things requiring further consideration. I hope some more come along soon. The advert had hardly any responses and most parents were against the idea if they could not be told the content of the stories. It seemed like the parents were more interested in knowing what their children had to say second hand than giving them an opportunity to say it. My confidentiality requirement has definitely put some parents off.

#### 24.2.99

Thank goodness, participant two. Went much better than the first one that was a nightmare. I am so tired and have been working flat out until the early hours every night producing posters and information sheets to advertise. Progress is so slow getting participants.

#### 28.2.99

I had to go to see [ ] as it looks as though the study may fall through due to slow pace of recruitment. Agreed if I didn't get 12 by mid March I had better defer – devastated!! Working day and night to publicise the project but very slow take up. It would be a shame if that happened after all my work. Unfortunately with all my efforts going into recruitment, no time to get on with Introduction and we agreed it was not worth it if I wasn't going to pursue the study. Crunch time is coming soon.

#### 6.3.99

Finally things are paying off and I have a few participants. I feel I have to see them all back to back as I can't drive to the west country etc and only see one child....

#### Issues from Interviews

What do I want from parent interview? Parents want to talk much more about their experiences than I thought I needed from them but maybe this is very telling or may be this is what they think I am asking? Often these parents interviews take up a lot of time. What do children make of this? Dilemma arose in child interview especially, where does research end and therapy begin? Part of me felt I stopped the child prematurely by over-concern for protecting them from going too deep, but am I, or am I protecting myself and giving them the message I cannot bear to hear it?

#### 21.3.99

It seems like a good point to list my assumptions at the beginning of the transcribing are that:

- 1) the departure of the NRP is a significant event in the life of the child
- 2) this event can have positive as well as negative aspects
- 3) the NRP can be mum as well as dad
- 4) mum is usually the main caregiver and as such the child, when young, is probably more affected by the departure
- 5) the impact on a father leaving affects the child in different ways at different stages in life including adult life
- 6) the effects include how you view yourself and other family members especially the other parent
- 7) the meaning of the departure of the parent is possibly different for boys than for girls
- 8) children have limited understanding of the events especially the legal process of divorce court welfare officers etc.
- 9) parents and solicitors are unsure and nervous about exactly what to tell children
- 10) children are unsure and nervous about what to ask or tell parents
- 11) divorce (now PRB) is more than a single event and many of the most important events go on in your mind not in the outside world.

I am sure there are more but I can not think of them.



15.4.99

Clarke (1989) gives the definition of "creation of meaning" as "a processing task engaged in when strong emotional arousal is present". (p.139)..... Gendlin (1962) talks of creating linguistic symbols for the "felt sense" of an experience. Do children do this and how helpful is it really? Can they do it? ....Clarke (1989) refers to a "clinical indicator or marker" = moment when creation of meaning event is at hand. Three features:

- 1) strong emotional arousal
- 2) indication of confronted or challenged cherished beliefs
- 3) indication of confusion, surprise or lack of understanding

All avoided by parents in desire to 'protect' children therefore how create meaning?

21.4.99

Re-reading Strauss and Corbin reminded me and reassured me of why I wanted to use grounded theory. This approach both gives me the space to think creatively about the individual participants experiences of divorce and the facts of divorce itself in the context of my wealth of literature in my head but then allows me to check-out the literature with the data. This prevents alienation of the data from literature and vice versa enabling a coherent story of the research across information sources thus creating hopefully a coherent theory.

I am very concerned having finished my interviews that I did not question the children more for their meaning i.e. I took too much for granted perhaps and have failed to analyse sufficiently between each interview. My analysis at the early stages was in far too general terms I think just examining themes based upon specific facts. Strauss and Corbin have reminded me how much more I can do with the data.

16.5.99

Whilst analysing I have noticed that I have frequently lost important information and failed to pursue important themes by moving the child on to the next topic before the previous is adequately explored. For example, Davy's dreams re: dad as slimy alien with knife I have not followed through and when the tape ends on side one I often lose the thread by the time I turn it over.

Went up many blind alleys emotionally as the children did not have the capacity to answer abstract questions and sometimes appeared to hit loyalty dilemmas too.

27.5.99

Yesterday's away-day on placement backed my focus up by a talk by the Consultant Psychiatrist of the National Children's Bureau Initiative to enhance the view of the child. It is at least being addressed in children's services. Currently, such services have been failing in being accessible to children practically and psychologically.

29.5.99

Reading Shattered Assumptions (Janoff-Bulman, 1992) has led to the blossoming of ideas about the analysis. ...Assumptions seems like a way of integrating the more cognitive theories with the attachment theory and learned helplessness. ....I guess this is also like Bowlby's ideas of internal working models of the world, though I wasn't thinking of this when I devised the notion of permanency but I suppose it is similar to children having a representation of family life as a safe object that can be lost in the same way as an individual object can be lost to the child. Interesting thing is the near universality of it with the exception of a couple in the baby group who arguably did not form the same internal representation or assumption. Society too has expected parents to stay together for years for the sake of the children.

The idea of new experiences and outcomes mould the child's assumptions of the meaningfulness of events fits with Bowlby's observations who feels children are particularly plastic before the age of 5 but are then flexible into adulthood to a lesser extent. Subsequent information makes less impact on assumptions than early information and this early representations are extremely powerful.

1.6.99

I gave myself the job of re-visiting Riessman's book on Narrative Analysis. I have been looking forward to this but did not feel I should be diverted from the Introduction until it was structured. It described everything I wanted to capture from the children's stories. The participants' stories flashed at me as I read

yet due to the very non-prescriptive nature of the proponents I am mystified and yet excited about how I will create a narrative analysis that will reflect fully my participants' stories. When I say "fully" one of my biggest disappointments is the criticism and then acceptance of the reality that the beauty of the whole narrative cannot be included for confidentiality/ethical practices and word limit reasons and yet without being able to do so pragmatic means of validity (Riessman, 1993) are restricted from me. ...I am increasingly aware of the constraints on me. I comfort myself that I can continue research after I hand in, yet motivation wanes in developing ideas further after the event.

### 3.6.99

Today I have entered the most fascinating stage of my research – more so even than the interviews. Analysis feels like something I have been building up to for a long time. I have learnt that there are no shortcuts to the thinking process upon which qualitative analysis is built. There is no cookbook for genuine qualitative analysis where you are waiting for the data to "speak" to you and guide your analysis. Unfortunately, I am prone to use cookbook – this reduces my anxiety and makes me feel "this must be right I have read it somewhere". However, I am newly liberated, grateful for the freedom to explore the qualities of narrative analysis methodologies and GT. Neither has all the answers – only my data and ingenuity can identify "my" answer to analysis undoubtedly different from the next person's. This highlights not only the very subjective quality of some qualitative research which I love – a creative process (yet no less rigorous than other research) but also for me, my responsibility to my participants. Naturally, the results must reflect the grounding in the data but I am after more than that – I am not sure what yet. Right now I am grappling with Catherine's transcript. I have observed the ease generally at which I have been able to identify narrative as I define it and how my choice of comments or questions enhance, interfere or were ignored within the narrative.

The data is so rich – I constantly think how I can present it to reflect Catherine's story in priority over "my" story. I have to question for whose benefit however as confidentiality limits its exposure. Reading has raised my awareness of defining narrative/story. I have noticed that between narratives the children sometimes provide the very useful clarification statements about their feelings opening up a second discourse about feelings between me and the child which is not in the main story for Catherine. I am therefore guiding two parallel discourses at once.

### 7.6.99

This morning I went back to Rudi Dallos's book on Narrative – very useful yet feels like even more to incorporate in my already inflated Introduction and I feel I do not want to impose ideas on to the results so not sure if I should be reading still but Riessman (1993) and Strauss and Corbin say I can if I wish.

### 11.6.99

I am starting what I see as stage 1 of the process, I am going through all the 18 stories (my now reduced sample) identifying the main events and experiences. This sounds quite straightforward in theory but is, as always, a nightmare in practice. I just have to be systematic about this – no problem, so I have to make clear yet rather unhelpful distinctions about what I will and will not include.

Firstly – events. I obviously cannot include every single happening. I have to limit it or this will be meaningless. But I have to keep it as much as I can at this stage as I should have no preconceptions yet as to the meaning of events beyond what is already clarified by doing narrative analysis. There is a fine line between simply recording and logging events and interpreting them "as being" events. In order to be clear about my distinctions I have to record these distinctions that I am making so here goes. The narrative analysis provides help with this as the complicating action is generally the event but sometimes its significance is in the complicating action but the event is named in the orientation. Therefore I could not stick to this strict rule or it would eliminate important events. Also events arose in Q&A too. So my rules about events can be summarised as follows:

- 1) they are not experiences – i.e. feelings, thoughts of the child that were greatly significant to them
- 2) they include only the main event – defined by its context – what is the event the child is referring to as having some significance to them
- 3) sometimes there are more than one event per narrative e.g. Clare spoke of parents arguing and her listening on the stairs within the same narrative – both are clearly significant to her and more importantly over inclusion was better than under inclusion as it was not clear from this if event 1) or 2) was the most

important for her to say.

4) very occasionally an event arises in a Q&A that was

- a) not prompted by the researcher
- b) appeared to be of particular significance to the child not just a casual answer to the researcher's question -- then and only then is it included as generally Q&A are more researcher-led than is desirable and so are not included but there are exceptions to this

Experiences are rather different and even harder to determine as they are easily confused with:

1) evaluations -- child's interpretation of events which is often about thoughts and feelings of great significance but are not significant "event" equivalents.

2) responses to events at the time such as this example.

Contrast:

Jack hearing his parents argue makes him very distressed until he feels sick. When asked what he was scared about he said feeling sick. This experience of feeling sick goes beyond a response to the event -- arguing of parents and is an "event" (experience) in and of itself.

Had Jack just said I was upset to see my parents fighting or responded that he was upset when asked by the researcher, this would be of less significance in the context of the narrative and thus would not be an "experience" in its own right.

This probably seems all very subtle and complicated but I feel it is necessary to use this subtlety as much is lost from the story without it. My consideration of whether to extend my research question to include experiences as well as the more concrete events reflects this need that has materialised from the data.

#### 12.6.99

Sorting the events and experiences made it clear that they must be kept separate and in fact I ended up only doing the events initially as there were so many, this was already a major task. Also, the events generally directly related to the experiences or vice versa. Therefore it made sense to start with events and then consider carefully which events I would focus upon as there were so many and then focus in-depth on the related experience of these events. I am now at that stage. I notice from the events that extracting them from their context detracts their meaning and so their grounding. So while it is useful to have the list of events to answer Research Q1. To look at Research Question 2 I need to return to the holistic data and although I have listed the experiences, they are so out of context that I am resorting to my original plan and not putting them out separately yet.

Using Headley's "communication" events themes I began exploring the links between the events he describes and his experiences of those events in more detail. I am unsure yet where this will take me.

I have so many events themes that I cannot analyse them all in-depth and so had to devise a means of assimilating themes into super-ordinate themes to enable analysis in-depth. Constant comparison was used to identify the supra-ordinate themes. I started by looking at Headley's themes of communication as this was a theme mentioned by a large number of children (themes were initially chosen on the basis of there being four children having this event theme in their story). Because of the complexity of the issues and the limitations of the interview depth (i.e. can only get children to think so deeply about an issue and then they are lost and want to move on). Therefore I found it more useful to achieve supra-ordinate themes by effectively formulating on each child to begin with incorporating therefore both the events and the children's evaluations together with broader data for triangulation purposes into large flow charts made up of multiple dimensions of multiple variables the child has described and from this I have used a process of backward chaining i.e. asking the two questions:

- 1) How did this immediate situation come about?

## 2) How did the child respond to/manage it?

This was found to be a very informative means of exploring the entire story and began to extrapolate important "exparental" themes of the child. Effectively this was a form of constant comparison within the story. This was expanded throughout the process by constant comparison between children's stories when exploring each exparental theme the researcher asked herself:

1) Which other child had a similar experience?

2) Which child had a different experience?

I ran through the list of all children to perform this process. It was surprisingly easy to find excerpts of text that clearly categorise many children but others may have said little on the point or it was not possible to extrapolate from their narrative a possible position and so these were not included in the particular comparison being examined as it was not possible to "ground" the findings sufficiently. An important area to discuss were these children with little narrative from the "baby" group (where parents separated as babies). This group often said little as a group on an issue that was highlighted by almost all the other children. This sometimes seemed so dramatic that it was included as a dimensional extreme. For example, Jocelyn, Harvey and Evelyn had few complaints about being able to discuss anything with each parent and could see them as much as they needed and did not have to manage their parents distress particularly from the stories compared to the remaining children. They appeared generally better adjusted. Every time these children's circumstances were examined, I felt convinced that these were not ongoing issues for these children and so they lay at one end of an important dimension. The dimensions of becoming increasingly defined. Dimension 1 has moved from being about parents prioritising the child to be more seen as a power balance in systemic terms mainly but when compared with the intra-psychic level the emphasis changed to linking it more to being held in mind and internalising being held in mind by the parent. This was a powerful concept that seemed to describe the data well across all levels from intra-physic to inter-personal to family systemic levels. This can be likened to ideas from Mary Main – "sensitivity" to give degree is the parent sensitive to the child and in constant touch with this giving the child an inner confidence of being powerful in the world and capable of being able to communicate his/her needs and that they will be met? Main's work is at a much earlier stage of development yet the hope if not expectation of being cared for and about remained in the children who had the more secure attachments to their parents e.g. Rebecca and Headley. Children such as Sebastian had long since lost such hope of being held in mind and cared for and he had resorted to other means of getting his needs met.

### 18.6.99

Reading Erikson (1977) I realised that the issue of identity cannot be taken from one point i.e. now without consideration of the past. Children's progression of each developmental stage influences where the child is now – each stage is not necessarily completed satisfactorily and the child can be left with the consequences of this. It is not possible to escape:

- 1) the developmental context of the timing of the significant "events" for the child of previous parental conflict, separation, contact and events of communication of the ongoing relationship
- 2) the legacy of the child's internalised view of their previous relationship with each parent before PRB. This is highly significant to children's framing of separation events and/or predictive of parent post-PRB behaviour towards the child. As research has suggested the latter is not always the case as sometimes the relationship can improve where it has been poor – this leads me to question the subtlety of the research to note the parent's construction of the child to them – perhaps previously taken for granted. Can the child's internal model of that relationship change overnight as dad suddenly notices the child when they were about to lose them. What is the nature and motive for this new found interest and is it enough to change the child's views?

### 23.6.99

Today I began to examine the positive events with NRP theme as this was raised by several children. This was interesting as it was also the same children who described parental disharmony prior to the break-up. The researcher was immediately drawn to Mike as his dichotomy between seeing the positives of his dad and negatives produced the most tension. His comments that his mother doesn't understand because she does not realise that his dad is half nice was powerful and clearly very important to him and yet at one level surprising as he had observed and been victim to his dad's "bad side" and been recently and

ongoingly rejected by him. My starting point was the idea that Mike's representation of his dad as a positive person was important and in some way connected to the negative. He appeared to be processing this information, it had meaning to him. Reading the story as a whole it is clear that he fears he shares the "bad" parts of dad. This was triangulated with reports from mum and the CBCL scores. The hypothesis was that the importance of dad being viewed as positive related to his own view of his potential to be "good". When we examine the context, we see that mum was the original rejector who was not prepared to live with dad as "bad". Would she live with Mike as "bad"? Mike also rejected by dad wanted to remove this view of dad as bad to protect in Fairbairn's terms his ego by attaching the needy, dependent self to protect the fiction of an ideal caregiver instead blaming himself than the bad parent. This position is quite extreme. Mike had suffered a great deal at the hands of his father. He was then compared with Malcolm and Sebastian whose experiences in many ways was different but still Malcolm appeared to be grappling with the good and the bad parent and how that should be internalised in terms of self. I felt that Malcolm unlike Mike had been given the opportunity to take on the "good" parts of dad and retained a strong ego based upon this ideal object caregiver. Dad had taught him things so whilst he was a "git" he was also a good object. Malcolm's needy side rather than feeling attached and worthless as Mike experienced was unconscious. He described himself as not emotional like his brother Sebastian. Malcolm presented as outwardly rejecting of almost everyone, especially his own mother, yet had a warmth towards his present relationship with his dad, a forgiveness of not understanding one another.

The PRB appears to rekindle the experiences that developed the schizoid position in all of us as a baby, of the trauma of not being convinced that the object (the parent) loves him for himself and that the parent accepts his love as love (Gomez, 1998). Here the early experience of abandonment is lived in the world outside shockingly clearly and intolerably for Mike. The dimension emerging (from this vague theme) is degree of containment of this fear. How intolerable is it when a PRB happens for each child? For the "baby group" the experience is less clearly understood by me and the child is not able to describe the experience. Developing age appears to externalise what has been an internal trauma experience -- it is happening out there perhaps. Previously developed assumptions of the world built in to the personality over time were shattered as the confidence in the caregiver leaving you are shattered

#### 5.7.99

Today I had a complete day off from my research. I spent it at a child psychology conference in Oxford. The speakers shared one deeply important message that somehow appeared as if it was a new idea. That was the idea of understanding the child and parents' individual perspective in order to work most effectively with families. Although I know from my knowledge of the legislation, literature and children that this is a relatively new concept to carry across services. (Although people such as Hilton Davis and John Sharich have done it for years!). This convinced me all the more that while much of what is being said by children about their experience is unpalatable for parents and others to hear, that it is important and it is only by understanding individual constructs of children's experience (whether consistent with parents or others understanding of events or not) and working with those constructs is the way forward. Also seeking commonalities in these constructs, in terms of some of the themes and dimensions (events and experiences) of importance to children, can direct a focus of assessment and also further research and can direct parents to consider their position on the dimensions identified. An important criticism of previous interventions made by Hilton of lack of humility and a tendency to blame parents is a real concern. Children's perspectives must be considered as just that they are perspectives embedded in a particular stage of development that does not diminish the importance or potency of the child's experience nor mean that their feelings should be overlooked but it is an important consideration when helping parents manage their own guilt about PRB. The actions of the majority of parents are that of a person who loves their child and genuinely wants the best for them -- this is related to, but not necessarily consistent with, children's experience of PRB.

I finally believe I have reached theoretical saturation on one or two themes as all the children I consider now demonstrate the theme at some point in the dimension in a meaningful way and grounded in the data. I have some beautiful dimensions charts but my supervisor thinks they are too large - I now must begin to summarise my findings clearly using only the benefit of explanations for all my detailed analysis. The theory arising out of this process needs to be re-examined as I am relying on my recollection of it and need to be sure I am making appropriate links. Ideas on the systemic level have been around triangulation considering Headley's very extreme position of all parental anger and communication being directed through him or solicitors -- an intolerable situation.

Thinking about the concept of triangulation in relation to Headley I read Dallos (1991) on the subject. It

described Haley (1976) and Minuchin (1974) formulation that children can be a "peacemaker" in a triangulated situation. I did not feel that this fitted with Headley's experience. Where the parent is unable to express anger directly to the other parent as they may have done during the marriage proximity, new partners and practical limitations and social expectations cause the parent to focus the anger on the child as an object associated with the other parent. Like Minuchin and Haley's accounts this can be hidden or open. In Headley's case dad exerts his power over Headley to carry the burden without involving mum. Headley's desire to maximise the "goodness" of his relationship is unusual for a triangulated child in the usual sense. It is important not to become bogged down with specifics.

#### 9.7.99

Currently I am grappling with my ideas about the intrapsychic level of my analysis. Is it sufficiently grounded to make it theoretically useful? Much of the data has to be understood in context of the whole story that I cannot present on account of the size of the dissertation. Whilst I am satisfied in myself that my ideas are not only emerging from the data but also fully supported by it, it is difficult to be sure if the reader would feel persuaded – an important criterion of trustworthiness. I looked back to my methodology in Strauss and Corbin for more guidance but this added little as I was reliant on the data. I then looked to the literature to see what was said there to check whether there may be new avenues to consider that could clarify my findings.

Recently I have been interested in object relations literature, particularly Fairbairn but I feel concerned that this is too specific and though I can find examples that "fit" Fairbairn's model and explains much of what I have found, I feel I need to integrate it with the attachment theory and any number of others such as Winnicott ("false self") too that as they can all contribute something yet this takes me away from my findings and pigeon holes the data into already existing ways of thinking which may all may not be useful at this stage. I feel like I am swinging between reinventing the wheel and "fitting" the data into the models when I seek a known theoretical context that draws me away from the data itself.

#### 11.7.99

Lots of ideas coming together now.

1. Considering in terms of attachment theory and internal working models of the self and interpretation as separation at the break-up.
2. Examined Kelly's (1955) discrimination of similarities and differences from "other" as a developmental stage in this process.
3. Wondered about Malcolm being that much older than the others and wondered about Eric Erikson's developmental stages of developing self. This remains important in explaining how the child moves on past the search for certainty if they do at all depending upon the opportunities to develop the earlier stages before the trauma of separation occurs.
4. Felt a pull towards other psycho-dynamic models to explain the themes identified and particularly the choices of coping. Became very convinced by the face validity of Ronald Fairbairn's ideas. This could explain the noticeable tendencies of the children to wish to maintain the presence of the parent within their self in a positive way rather than initially simply reject that parent (phenomenon that happened later in the coping with the rejecting "parent" in self).

OR theory is useful in relation to the issue of guilt, not described much by the children but was described by Headley as not being good enough and by Malcolm as "not understanding" his dad (as if as a child he should have done!). Mike also said him and Laurel used to blame themselves but then realised it wasn't them. This would have been interesting to discuss but no room and few clear quotes clarifying this.

Most striking was the similarity between Malcolm's reference to his dad as "a git" and his cynical despairing of his dad and rejection of his own wimpish emotionalism of the past of being needy like his brother. Fairbairn would view this as the emergence out of repression of the anti-libidinal ego/rejecting object merging with the conscious central ego/ideal object. Fairbairn describes "secondary or indirect repression" as being the rejecting of the needy self (libidinal ego/exciting object) and disowning by the rejecting self (anti-libidinal ego/rejecting object). This appears very consistent with Malcolm and Headley's experiences.

This explains Malcolm's continued necessity of a relationship (internal) in the face of a blocked external relationship (Gomez, 1998) that is, his continued striving to please dad even in his prolonged absence and disinterest. Mike clearly has taken the badness within himself to enable him to continue to see the needed dad as a good enough dad and can continue to trust him at some level and relate to him even though "he can't be trusted to not be violent". Fairbairn calls this relocation of badness (Gomez, 1998) as the "moral defence" and connected it with the Freudian superego (Fairbairn, 1943). Inner persecution is coped with by internalising good experiences to consolidate the ideal object and enhance the repression of disavowed ego/objects to keep intolerable rejecting and exciting objects at bay.

I did not feel altogether satisfied with the completeness of this explanation of the themes of containment and being held in mind. Being in mind was better explained using attachment theory ideas as the trauma is surely mediated by the parents early bonding with the child and subsequent child attachment. Shows importance of a truly integrated model.

Ended diary at point when work on discussion began to as entries concerning theoretical ideas would be duplicated.

Purpose of Research Diary

1. To orient the reader to the theoretical and other influences upon the researcher's thinking.
2. To highlight some of the methodological challenges of the research process that may have impacted upon the findings.

For the sake of brevity (as this became a substantial document), only selected extracts of the diary are presented below.

Extracts from the researcher's diary

30.3.98

Spoke to Rudi Dallos recently about divorce topic and possibility of supervision. He recommended starting with Wallerstein and Kelly (1980). Finished reading it today – old but very good!

4.4.98

I would really like to do some research into attachment issues.

10.4.98

Decided to go ahead with divorce and particularly look at the relationship issues with non-resident parent (NRP). Wallerstein (1991) said children's experiences of PRB is not really understood that well and I haven't found much research on children's side of the story. Also of course, it is an issue close to my heart as my dad left and I lost contact.

2.6.98

Met with Hilton Davies blew my mind where to start but inspiring too. Discussed personal constructs and rep grids (Kelly, 1955).

20.6.98

Been reading about narratives and looked Gorell Barnes and Dowling (1997) – methodology unclear and clinical sample used – quite different from my interest but ideas of stories interesting. Want something even more child friendly – play and art work like Wallerstein?

19.8.98

Meeting at Salomons - Most important issue that came up was analysis. Shall I use narrative analysis too? Need to go away and find out more about it but it seems to fit quite nicely in terms of my aims of the study – to understand kids' stories and how they construct them, not what children are supposed to know or not know i.e. what have they been told - facts have different meanings for confused children than confused adults/parents/lawyers etc.

20.8.98

I am becoming aware of the limitations of this study. Will I be able to see enough kids to reach theoretical "saturation"? ... I am still waiting for The Law Society to get back to me on ethics stuff.

I am now very excited with the research having just spoken to Martin Cortazzi whose analysis of research methods was rather eye opening. I did not realise how narrow a view of research I had up to this point!

31.10.98

[ ]'s solicitors seem fairly happy with proposal but would like some sort of letter to introduce the research project to their clients – they wanted two versions one to NRP as they need to have consent from both. Already discussed this issue generally and decided untenable for whole sample but agree for [ ]'s sample.

Today I finally got off the Ethics Committee research proposal. There are still a few areas of concern to me. I am still not sure my Info.Sheets/Poster really sells the project to parents or children. I am also concerned about the length of questionnaire – will an eight-year-old really co-operate for this long? What am I expecting them to produce – I guess I am beginning to feel the story may well be brief, bitty, and



require more direction than I would like. Also I am predicting that interviewing in the parental home could well make the child's account aligned/biased to that participating parent but I see little option as parents are unlikely to want to travel anywhere.

...My view now of what is different about this study is perhaps:- I am interested in a non-clinical sample of children who have probably not told their story much and have multiple stories to tell. The idea is that by leaving the child to describe their story, particular events and fantasy might arise to explain events and their relationship with the NRP. Do I need to operationalise relationship or is this actually what will come out i.e. a meaning of relationship for child? What meanings do events have to the child?

#### 4.12.98

Met with Len Rowland -- very helpful to think about structuring the interview into spontaneous and structural parts and categories assured to direct interview.

#### 31.12.98

Reading Kim Sandler & Tein (1997) again confirms the validity for me of doing my research suggesting as it does that attribution of events of divorce is important especially when attributing psychological symptoms. Therefore finding out through grounded theory methods what events were significant for children seems another way of tackling this issue without the restriction of a theoretical attributional model of locus of control beliefs. This study looked at the same age-group as me (8-12) although it is a US study it appears very useful to bear in mind in my study.

It is difficult to know when to stop reading literature on "custody" matters (residence and contact now) and how much to use US studies which are much more common than UK studies.

#### 5.1.99

Met with 'JA' (family solicitor) and discussed divorce law and mediation procedure. Finally sent adverts to [ ] Advertiser and [ ] Times and [ ] Star for this week.

Reading Spigelman et al. (1992) reminded me how much the findings from my study will only represent a moment in time. That children were having very different experiences at separation compared to after the divorce when conflict is resolved. How real is my study going to be? Will children be able to give me a sense of their possible early angst and will it persist. It made me question the value of the research limited by so many unhelpful variables such as timing, venue, volunteer bias etc. The instructions used in the study raised the issue of whether I shall ask the participants to draw a family or their family -- what would be the impact of the latter and is there any data to compare the results with. Is it still projective?

#### 6.1.99

I was interested to read the article by Krakauer (1992) today but I found myself feeling less and less convinced that "children of divorce" of 20 years ago are the same as those today. Things were so different in my childhood to now. Having said this, the research suggesting premature maturity (Weiss, 1979) and feelings of abandonment and anger (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1976) are still likely to apply. But the theme of isolation may be less common than when Mitchell (1987) reported the theme.

#### 18.1.99

Telephoned around schools in [ ] area. I am aware I am neither random nor systematic in my choice. I am merely going through all the list of schools LEA gave me choosing by whether they:

- 1) answer
- 2) agree I can speak to Head or pass message
- 3) have possible children e.g. not RC strict

Some head teachers have been really encouraging and others have been totally against talking to children. I have had a similar reaction from professionals like [ ] who takes the attitude that children are so vulnerable that they should only be talked to in a clinical situation. I find this bizarre as these children are living with their experiences everyday and exposed to questioning from peers and other people about their circumstances in a far less sensitive way than my interview would be and without the elaborate safeguards of ethics, debriefing, supervision etc. It is interesting that there appears to be a gut reaction surrounding this issue as people generally are either in favour or against. The most frustrating thing is that they decide

this invariably before I have told them about my study.

#### 5.2.99

Today in our research seminar people talking made me realise the crux of the research is about "meanings" and the interaction between this and interpersonal relationships... Meeting left many questions in my mind about how to research meaning.

#### 15.2.99

Now that I have interviewed my first participants I have seen several things requiring further consideration. I hope some more come along soon. The advert had hardly any responses and most parents were against the idea if they could not be told the content of the stories. It seemed like the parents were more interested in knowing what their children had to say second hand than giving them an opportunity to say it. My confidentiality requirement has definitely put some parents off.

#### 24.2.99

Thank goodness, participant two. Went much better than the first one that was a nightmare. I am so tired and have been working flat out until the early hours every night producing posters and information sheets to advertise. Progress is so slow getting participants.

#### 28.2.99

Had to go to see [ ] as it looks as though the study may fall through due to slow pace of recruitment. Agreed if I didn't get 12 by mid March I had better defer – devastated!! Working day and night to publicise the project but very slow take up. It would be a shame if that happened after all my work. Unfortunately with all my efforts going into recruitment, no time to get on with Introduction and we agreed it was not worth it if I wasn't going to pursue the study. Crunch time is coming soon.

#### 6.3.99

Finally things are paying off and I have a few participants. I feel I have to see them all back to back as I can't drive to the west country etc and only see one child....

#### Issues from Interviews

What do I want from parent interview? Parents want to talk much more about their experiences than I thought I needed from them but maybe this is very telling or may be this is what they think I am asking? Often these parents interviews take up a lot of time. What do children make of this? Dilemma arose in child interview especially, where does research end and therapy begin? Part of me felt I stopped the child prematurely by over-concern for protecting them from going too deep, but am I, or am I protecting myself and giving them the message I cannot bear to hear it?

#### 21.3.99

It seems like a good point to list my assumptions at the beginning of the transcribing are that:

- 1) the departure of the NRP is a significant event in the life of the child
- 2) this event can have positive as well as negative aspects
- 3) the NRP can be mum as well as dad
- 4) mum is usually the main caregiver and as such the child, when young, is probably more affected by the departure
- 5) the impact on a father leaving affects the child in different ways at different stages in life including adult life
- 6) the effects include how you view yourself and other family members especially the other parent
- 7) the meaning of the departure of the parent is possibly different for boys than for girls
- 8) children have limited understanding of the events especially the legal process of divorce court welfare officers etc.
- 9) parents and solicitors are unsure and nervous about exactly what to tell children
- 10) children are unsure and nervous about what to ask or tell parents
- 11) divorce (now PRB) is more than a single event and many of the most important events go on in your mind not in the outside world.

I am sure there are more but I can not think of them.

#### 15.4.99

Clarke (1989) gives the definition of "creation of meaning" as "a processing task engaged in when strong emotional arousal is present". (p.139)..... Gendlin (1962) talks of creating linguistic symbols for the "felt sense" of an experience. Do children do this and how helpful is it really? Can they do it? ....Clarke (1989) refers to a "clinical indicator or marker" = moment when creation of meaning event is at hand. Three features:

- 1) strong emotional arousal
- 2) indication of confronted or challenged cherished beliefs
- 3) indication of confusion, surprise or lack of understanding

All avoided by parents in desire to 'protect' children therefore how create meaning?

#### 21.4.99

Re-reading Strauss and Corbin reminded me and reassured me of why I wanted to use grounded theory. This approach both gives me the space to think creatively about the individual participants experiences of divorce and the facts of divorce itself in the context of my wealth of literature in my head but then allows me to check-out the literature with the data. This prevents alienation of the data from literature and vice versa enabling a coherent story of the research across information sources thus creating hopefully a coherent theory.

I am very concerned having finished my interviews that I did not question the children more for their meaning i.e. I took too much for granted perhaps and have failed to analyse sufficiently between each interview. My analysis at the early stages was in far too general terms I think just examining themes based upon specific facts. Strauss and Corbin have reminded me how much more I can do with the data.

#### 16.5.99

Whilst analysing I have noticed that I have frequently lost important information and failed to pursue important themes by moving the child on to the next topic before the previous is adequately explored. For example, Davy's dreams re: dad as slimy alien with knife I have not followed through and when the tape ends on side one I often lose the thread by the time I turn it over.

Went up many blind alleys emotionally as the children did not have the capacity to answer abstract questions and sometimes appeared to hit loyalty dilemmas too.

#### 27.5.99

Yesterday's away-day on placement backed my focus up by a talk by the Consultant Psychiatrist of the National Children's Bureau Initiative to enhance the view of the child. It is at least being addressed in children's services. Currently, such services have been failing in being accessible to children practically and psychologically.

#### 29.5.99

Reading Shattered Assumptions (Janoff-Bulman, 1992) has led to the blossoming of ideas about the analysis. ... Assumptions seems like a way of integrating the more cognitive theories with the attachment theory and learned helplessness. ....I guess this is also like Bowlby's ideas of internal working models of the world, though I wasn't thinking of this when I devised the notion of permanency but I suppose it is similar to children having a representation of family life as a safe object that can be lost in the same way as an individual object can be lost to the child. Interesting thing is the near universality of it with the exception of a couple in the baby group who arguably did not form the same internal representation or assumption. Society too has expected parents to stay together for years for the sake of the children.

The idea of new experiences and outcomes mould the child's assumptions of the meaningfulness of events fits with Bowlby's observations who feels children are particularly plastic before the age of 5 but are then flexible into adulthood to a lesser extent. Subsequent information makes less impact on assumptions than early information and this early representations are extremely powerful.

#### 1.6.99

I gave myself the job of re-visiting Riessman's book on Narrative Analysis. I have been looking forward to this but did not feel I should be diverted from the Introduction until it was structured. It described everything I wanted to capture from the children's stories. The participants' stories flashed at me as I read

yet due to the very non-prescriptive nature of the proponents I am mystified and yet excited about how I will create a narrative analysis that will reflect fully my participants' stories. When I say "fully" one of my biggest disappointments is the criticism and then acceptance of the reality that the beauty of the whole narrative cannot be included for confidentiality/ethical practices and word limit reasons and yet without being able to do so pragmatic means of validity (Riessman, 1993) are restricted from me. ...I am increasingly aware of the constraints on me. I comfort myself that I can continue research after I hand in, yet motivation wanes in developing ideas further after the event.

### 3.6.99

Today I have entered the most fascinating stage of my research – more so even than the interviews. Analysis feels like something I have been building up to for a long time. I have learnt that there are no shortcuts to the thinking process upon which qualitative analysis is built. There is no cookbook for genuine qualitative analysis where you are waiting for the data to "speak" to you and guide your analysis. Unfortunately, I am prone to use cookbook – this reduces my anxiety and makes me feel "this must be right I have read it somewhere". However, I am newly liberated, grateful for the freedom to explore the qualities of narrative analysis methodologies and GT. Neither has all the answers – only my data and ingenuity can identify "my" answer to analysis undoubtedly different from the next person's. This highlights not only the very subjective quality of some qualitative research which I love – a creative process (yet no less rigorous than other research) but also for me, my responsibility to my participants. Naturally, the results must reflect the grounding in the data but I am after more than that – I am not sure what yet. Right now I am grappling with Catherine's transcript. I have observed the case generally at which I have been able to identify narrative as I define it and how my choice of comments or questions enhance, interfere or were ignored within the narrative.

The data is so rich – I constantly think how I can present it to reflect Catherine's story in priority over "my" story. I have to question for whose benefit however as confidentiality limits its exposure. Reading has raised my awareness of defining narrative/story. I have noticed that between narratives the children sometimes provide the very useful clarification statements about their feelings opening up a second discourse about feelings between me and the child which is not in the main story for Catherine. I am therefore guiding two parallel discourses at once.

### 7.6.99

This morning I went back to Rudi Dallos's book on Narrative – very useful yet feels like even more to incorporate in my already inflated Introduction and I feel I do not want to impose ideas on to the results so not sure if I should be reading still but Riessman (1993) and Strauss and Corbin say I can if I wish.

### 11.6.99

I am starting what I see as stage 1 of the process, I am going through all the 18 stories (my now reduced sample) identifying the main events and experiences. This sounds quite straightforward in theory but is, as always, a nightmare in practice. I just have to be systematic about this – no problem, so I have to make clear yet rather unhelpful distinctions about what I will and will not include.

Firstly -- events. I obviously cannot include every single happening. I have to limit it or this will be meaningless. But I have to keep it as much as I can at this stage as I should have no preconceptions yet as to the meaning of events beyond what is already clarified by doing narrative analysis. There is a fine line between simply recording and logging events and interpreting them "as being" events. In order to be clear about my distinctions I have to record these distinctions that I am making so here goes. The narrative analysis provides help with this as the complicating action is generally the event but sometimes its significance is in the complicating action but the event is named in the orientation. Therefore I could not stick to this strict rule or it would eliminate important events. Also events arose in Q&A too. So my rules about events can be summarised as follows:

- 1) they are not experiences – i.e. feelings, thoughts of the child that were greatly significant to them
- 2) they include only the main event – defined by its context – what is the event the child is referring to as having some significance to them
- 3) sometimes there are more than one event per narrative e.g. Clare spoke of parents arguing and her listening on the stairs within the same narrative – both are clearly significant to her and more importantly over inclusion was better than under inclusion as it was not clear from this if event 1) or 2) was the most

important for her to say.

4) very occasionally an event arises in a Q&A that was

- a) not prompted by the researcher
- b) appeared to be of particular significance to the child not just a casual answer to the researcher's question -- then and only then is it included as generally Q&A are more researcher-led than is desirable and so are not included but there are exceptions to this

Experiences are rather different and even harder to determine as they are easily confused with:

1) evaluations -- child's interpretation of events which is often about thoughts and feelings of great significance but are not significant "event" equivalents.

2) responses to events at the time such as this example.

Contrast:

Jack hearing his parents argue makes him very distressed until he feels sick. When asked what he was scared about he said feeling sick. This experience of feeling sick goes beyond a response to the event -- arguing of parents and is an "event" (experience) in and of itself.

Had Jack just said I was upset to see my parents fighting or responded that he was upset when asked by the researcher, this would be of less significance in the context of the narrative and thus would not be an "experience" in its own right.

This probably seems all very subtle and complicated but I feel it is necessary to use this subtlety as much is lost from the story without it. My consideration of whether to extend my research question to include experiences as well as the more concrete events reflects this need that has materialised from the data.

#### 12.6.99

Sorting the events and experiences made it clear that they must be kept separate and in fact I ended up only doing the events initially as there were so many, this was already a major task. Also, the events generally directly related to the experiences or vice versa. Therefore it made sense to start with events and then consider carefully which events I would focus upon as there were so many and then focus in-depth on the related experience of these events. I am now at that stage. I notice from the events that extracting them from their context detracts their meaning and so their grounding. So while it is useful to have the list of events to answer Research Q1. To look at Research Question 2 I need to return to the holistic data and although I have listed the experiences, they are so out of context that I am resorting to my original plan and not putting them out separately yet.

Using Headley's "communication" events themes I began exploring the links between the events he describes and his experiences of those events in more detail. I am unsure yet where this will take me.

I have so many events themes that I cannot analyse them all in-depth and so had to devise a means of assimilating themes into super-ordinate themes to enable analysis in-depth. Constant comparison was used to identify the supra-ordinate themes. I started by looking at Headley's themes of communication as this was a theme mentioned by a large number of children (themes were initially chosen on the basis of there being four children having this event theme in their story). Because of the complexity of the issues and the limitations of the interview depth (i.e. can only get children to think so deeply about an issue and then they are lost and want to move on). Therefore I found it more useful to achieve supra-ordinate themes by effectively formulating on each child to begin with incorporating therefore both the events and the children's evaluations together with broader data for triangulation purposes into large flow charts made up of multiple dimensions of multiple variables the child has described and from this I have used a process of backward chaining i.e. asking the two questions:

1) How did this immediate situation come about?

## 2) How did the child respond to/manage it?

This was found to be a very informative means of exploring the entire story and began to extrapolate important "exparental" themes of the child. Effectively this was a form of constant comparison within the story. This was expanded throughout the process by constant comparison between children's stories when exploring each exparental theme the researcher asked herself:

1) Which other child had a similar experience?

2) Which child had a different experience?

I ran through the list of all children to perform this process. It was surprisingly easy to find excerpts of text that clearly categorise many children but others may have said little on the point or it was not possible to extrapolate from their narrative a possible position and so these were not included in the particular comparison being examined as it was not possible to "ground" the findings sufficiently. An important area to discuss were these children with little narrative from the "baby" group (where parents separated as babies). This group often said little as a group on an issue that was highlighted by almost all the other children. This sometimes seemed so dramatic that it was included as a dimensional extreme. For example, Jocelyn, Harvey and Evelyn had few complaints about being able to discuss anything with each parent and could see them as much as they needed and did not have to manage their parents distress particularly from the stories compared to the remaining children. They appeared generally better adjusted. Every time these children's circumstances were examined, I felt convinced that these were not ongoing issues for these children and so they lay at one end of an important dimension. The dimensions of becoming increasingly defined. Dimension 1 has moved from being about parents prioritising the child to be more seen as a power balance in systemic terms mainly but when compared with the intra-psycho level the emphasis changed to linking it more to being held in mind and internalising being held in mind by the parent. This was a powerful concept that seemed to describe the data well across all levels from intra-physic to inter-personal to family systemic levels. This can be likened to ideas from Mary Main – "sensitivity" to give degree is the parent sensitive to the child and in constant touch with this giving the child an inner confidence of being powerful in the world and capable of being able to communicate his/her needs and that they will be met? Main's work is at a much earlier stage of development yet the hope if not expectation of being cared for and about remained in the children who had the more secure attachments to their parents e.g. Rebecca and Headley. Children such as Sebastian had long since lost such hope of being held in mind and cared for and he had resorted to other means of getting his needs met.

### 18.6.99

Reading Erikson (1977) I realized that the issue of identity cannot be taken from one point i.e. now without consideration of the past. Children's progression of each developmental stage influences where the child is now – each stage is not necessarily completed satisfactorily and the child can be left with the consequences of this. It is not possible to escape:

1) the developmental context of the timing of the significant "events" for the child of previous parental conflict, separation, contact and events of communication of the ongoing relationship

2) the legacy of the child's internalised view of their previous relationship with each parent before PRB. This is highly significant to children's framing of separation events and/or predictive of parent post-PRB behaviour towards the child. As research has suggested the latter is not always the case as sometimes the relationship can improve where it has been poor – this leads me to question the subtlety of the research to note the parent's construction of the child to them – perhaps previously taken for granted. Can the child's internal model of that relationship change overnight as dad suddenly notices the child when they were about to lose them. What is the nature and motive for this new found interest and is it enough to change the child's views?

### 23.6.99

Today I began to examine the positive events with NRP theme as this was raised by several children. This was interesting as it was also the same children who described parental disharmony prior to the break-up. The researcher was immediately drawn to Mike as his dichotomy between seeing the positives of his dad and negatives produced the most tension. His comments that his mother doesn't understand because she does not realise that his dad is half nice was powerful and clearly very important to him and yet at one level surprising as he had observed and been victim to his dad's "bad side" and been recently and

ongoingly rejected by him. My starting point was the idea that Mike's representation of his dad as a positive person was important and in some way connected to the negative. He appeared to be processing this information, it had meaning to him. Reading the story as a whole it is clear that he fears he shares the "bad" parts of dad. This was triangulated with reports from mum and the CBCL scores. The hypothesis was that the importance of dad being viewed as positive related to his own view of his potential to be "good". When we examine the context, we see that mum was the original rejector who was not prepared to live with dad as "bad". Would she live with Mike as "bad"? Mike also rejected by dad wanted to remove this view of dad as bad to protect in Fairbairn's terms his ego by attaching the needy, dependent self to protect the fiction of an ideal caregiver instead blaming himself than the bad parent. This position is quite extreme. Mike had suffered a great deal at the hands of his father. He was then compared with Malcolm and Sebastian whose experiences in many ways was different but still Malcolm appeared to be grappling with the good and the bad parent and how that should be internalised in terms of self. I felt that Malcolm unlike Mike had been given the opportunity to take on the "good" parts of dad and retained a strong ego based upon this ideal object caregiver. Dad had taught him things so whilst he was a "git" he was also a good object. Malcolm's needy side rather than feeling attached and worthless as Mike experienced was unconscious. He described himself as not emotional like his brother Sebastian. Malcolm presented as outwardly rejecting of almost everyone, especially his own mother, yet had a warmth towards his present relationship with his dad, a forgiveness of not understanding one another.

The PRB appears to rekindle the experiences that developed the schizoid position in all of us as a baby, of the trauma of not being convinced that the object (the parent) loves him for himself and that the parent accepts his love as love (Gomez, 1998). Here the early experience of abandonment is lived in the world outside shockingly clearly and intolerably for Mike. The dimension emerging (from this vague theme) is degree of containment of this fear. How intolerable is it when a PRB happens for each child? For the "baby group" the experience is less clearly understood by me and the child is not able to describe the experience. Developing age appears to externalise what has been an internal trauma experience – it is happening out there perhaps. Previously developed assumptions of the world built in to the personality over time were shattered as the confidence in the caregiver leaving you are shattered

#### 5.7.99

Today I had a complete day off from my research. I spent it at a child psychology conference in Oxford. The speakers shared one deeply important message that somehow appeared as if it was a new idea. That was the idea of understanding the child and parents' individual perspective in order to work most effectively with families. Although I know from my knowledge of the legislation, literature and children that this is a relatively new concept to carry across services. (Although people such as Hilton Davis and John Sharich have done it for years!). This convinced me all the more that while much of what is being said by children about their experience is unpalatable for parents and others to hear, that it is important and it is only by understanding individual constructs of children's experience (whether consistent with parents or others understanding of events or not) and working with those constructs is the way forward. Also seeking commonalities in these constructs, in terms of some of the themes and dimensions (events and experiences) of importance to children, can direct a focus of assessment and also further research and can direct parents to consider their position on the dimensions identified. An important criticism of previous interventions made by Hilton of lack of humility and a tendency to blame parents is a real concern. Children's perspectives must be considered as just that they are perspectives embedded in a particular stage of development that does not diminish the importance or potency of the child's experience nor mean that their feelings should be overlooked but it is an important consideration when helping parents manage their own guilt about PRB. The actions of the majority of parents are that of a person who loves their child and genuinely wants the best for them – this is related to, but not necessarily consistent with, children's experience of PRB.

I finally believe I have reached theoretical saturation on one or two themes as all the children I consider now demonstrate the theme at some point in the dimension in a meaningful way and grounded in the data. I have some beautiful dimensions charts but my supervisor thinks they are too large - I now must begin to summarise my findings clearly using only the benefit of explanations for all my detailed analysis. The theory arising out of this process needs to be re-examined as I am relying on my recollection of it and need to be sure I am making appropriate links. Ideas on the systemic level have been around triangulation considering Headley's very extreme position of all parental anger and communication being directed through him or solicitors – an intolerable situation.

Thinking about the concept of triangulation in relation to Headley I read Dallos (1991) on the subject. It

described Haley (1976) and Minuchin (1974) formulation that children can be a "peacemaker" in a triangulated situation. I did not feel that this fitted with Headley's experience. Where the parent is unable to express anger directly to the other parent as they may have done during the marriage proximity, new partners and practical limitations and social expectations cause the parent to focus the anger on the child as an object associated with the other parent. Like Minuchin and Haley's accounts this can be hidden or open. In Headley's case dad exerts his power over Headley to carry the burden without involving mum. Headley's desire to maximize the "goodness" of his relationship is unusual for a triangulated child in the usual sense. It is important not to become bogged down with specifics.

#### 9.7.99

Currently I am grappling with my ideas about the intrapsychic level of my analysis. Is it sufficiently grounded to make it theoretically useful? Much of the data has to be understood in context of the whole story that I cannot present on account of the size of the dissertation. Whilst I am satisfied in myself that my ideas are not only emerging from the data but also fully supported by it, it is difficult to be sure if the reader would feel persuaded -- an important criterion of trustworthiness. I looked back to my methodology in Strauss and Corbin for more guidance but this added little as I was reliant on the data. I then looked to the literature to see what was said there to check whether there may be new avenues to consider that could clarify my findings.

Recently I have been interested in object relations literature, particularly Fairbairn but I feel concerned that this is too specific and though I can find examples that "fit" Fairbairn's model and explains much of what I have found, I feel I need to integrate it with the attachment theory and any number of others such as Winnicott ("false self") too that as they can all contribute something yet this takes me away from my findings and pigeon holes the data into already existing ways of thinking which may all may not be useful at this stage. I feel like I am swinging between reinventing the wheel and "fitting" the data into the models when I seek a known theoretical context that draws me away from the data itself.

#### 11.7.99

Lots of ideas coming together now.

1. Considering in terms of attachment theory and internal working models of the self and interpretation as separation at the break-up.
2. Examined Kelly's (1955) discrimination of similarities and differences from "other" as a developmental stage in this process.
3. Wondered about Malcolm being that much older than the others and wondered about Eric Erikson's developmental stages of developing self. This remains important in explaining how the child moves on past the search for certainty if they do at all depending upon the opportunities to develop the earlier stages before the trauma of separation occurs.
4. Felt a pull towards other psycho-dynamic models to explain the themes identified and particularly the choices of coping. Became very convinced by the face validity of Ronald Fairbairn's ideas. This could explain the noticeable tendencies of the children to wish to maintain the presence of the parent within their self in a positive way rather than initially simply reject that parent (phenomenon that happened later in the coping with the rejecting "parent" in self).

OR theory is useful in relation to the issue of guilt, not described much by the children but was described by Headley as not being good enough and by Malcolm as "not understanding" his dad (as if as a child he should have done!). Mike also said him and Laurel used to blame themselves but then realised it wasn't them. This would have been interesting to discuss but no room and few clear quotes clarifying this.

Most striking was the similarity between Malcolm's reference to his dad as "a git" and his cynical despairing of his dad and rejection of his own wimpish emotionalism of the past of being needy like his brother. Fairbairn would view this as the emergence out of repression of the anti-libidinal ego/rejecting object merging with the conscious central ego/ideal object. Fairbairn describes "secondary or indirect repression" as being the rejecting of the needy self (libidinal ego/exciting object) and disowning by the rejecting self (anti-libidinal ego/rejecting object). This appears very consistent with Malcolm and Headley's experiences.



This explains Malcolm's continued necessity of a relationship (internal) in the face of a blocked external relationship (Gomez, 1998) that is, his continued striving to please dad even in his prolonged absence and disinterest. Mike clearly has taken the badness within himself to enable him to continue to see the needed dad as a good enough dad and can continue to trust him at some level and relate to him even though "he can't be trusted to not be violent". Fairbairn calls this relocation of badness (Gomez, 1998) as the "moral defence" and connected it with the Freudian superego (Fairbairn, 1943). Inner persecution is coped with by internalising good experiences to consolidate the ideal object and enhance the repression of disavowed ego/objects to keep intolerable rejecting and exciting objects at bay.

I did not feel altogether satisfied with the completeness of this explanation of the themes of containment and being held in mind. Being in mind was better explained using attachment theory ideas as the trauma is surely mediated by the parents early bonding with the child and subsequent child attachment. Shows importance of a truly integrated model.

Ended diary at point when work on discussion began to as entries concerning theoretical ideas would be duplicated.

**Categories for Ranking the Children**

<b>Rank Category</b>	<b>Description of Defining Characteristics of Category</b>
1	Specified no problems, CBCL non-clinical
2	No mention of problems for this child but problems mentioned for sibling, CBCL non-clinical
3	Problems in the past but not currently, CBCL non-clinical
4	This child more affected than sibling - unspecified
5	One problem mentioned overall – no evidence of severity
6	Two problems mentioned and/or some evidence may be severe
7	Three or more problems and/or seems severe

**Table of main events described in children's stories and emerging thematic categories**

Broad Theme & No. of Participants	Events Theme	Example Quotation and/or Summary of Event	Participants
<i>Representations of Family Life (8)</i>	Former family life (family life: both parents being with the child, for the child)	Bradley 235 when I was a baby, my Uncle 238 ...had a video camera and I still watch [the video] today [started to cry]. Maddie 498 And we were always playing games and dad's quite fast 499 with the cards and then mum would be slowly shuffling them...	Rebecca, Catherine, Claire, Maddie, Bradley, Headley
	Alternative current family life	Samantha 260 I love like 261 um my birthday, that's just gone, my dad came down and we all 262 just like had like a sort of party really. It was really nice because 263 they were like all together	Samantha, Jocelyn, Bradley, Maddie
	Future, hypothetical, family Life	846 I think it'll take quite a long time for them to 847 um get friends, but I do hope I think they will, because why 848 would they have married if they weren't friends	Jocelyn, Maddie
<i>Representations of NRP (6)</i>	Recall of positive events with NRP	Malcolm 046 he used to help me on some things, he used to sometimes help me with a project Claire 189 I remember that, when he used to go down 190 on his hands and knees 192 ... and then we got onto his back, 193 and then started going Ya Ya giddy up! So he was a 194 horse!	Michael, Zena, Sebastian, Malcolm, Claire,
	Recall of ambivalent/negative events with NRP	Sebastian 093 it's really boring with dad, sometimes it's a 094 bit funny because he is usually watching TV. We have a video game 095 but we were never allowed to play it because he was like watching TV. 096 he used to like "turn 097 it off!" [Later describes missing this] <u>contrast</u> Malcolm 004 dad was like a git. 005 when he came home, he was a real grump all day and he just sort of went out 006 the pub on Friday and then came back and was a right mood.	Sebastian, Malcolm
	Recall of negative events with NRP and others  - objects  - others	Zena 067 he came over and 068 did something really silly like he pushed the table over, he gets like really 069 annoyed. <u>contrast</u> Michael 009 Well my father, he used to beat my mum up quite a lot and my 010 mum's dog.	Michael, Sebastian, Davy, Zena, Malcolm
<i>Unwilling involvement in parental relationship prior to separation (10)</i>	"Being a doll in the middle": parents discussing future	Rebecca 401 There's a lot 402 of decisions being made. I thought I'll I'll I'm still here I 403 don't want to hear this{laugh}—like really weird. I felt 404 like a doll in the middle of the room hearing all this was 405 like, no really horrible, because like in court...	Rebecca

<i>continued</i>	Overhears dad tell babysitter (future wife) she's pretty	Headley 551 I heard him say [babysitter] was pretty on the phone, 552 knowing that, I felt a bit annoyed at that really,	Headley
	Parental disharmony/ arguments observed/heard  - major fights  - subtle change	Claire 087 I used to sometimes come down 088 from my room and sit on the stairs and just peep 089 through the hannisters and watch them fighting, shout <u>contrast</u> Maddie 566 to me it's very 567 suddenly because I only heard them um talking um not the 568 best ways to each other (laughs).	Maddie, Catherine, Michael, Sebastian, Claire, Zena
	Unclear / possible parental conflict observed/heard  - indirect evidence   - direct evidence	Davy 267 I heard this knock on 268 the door, I went out of my bed and there is a Copper on the door 269 and he took dad away and I was like "what's wrong?" And then I 270 wake up and mum said "dad's gone to talk to the policeman" and I 271 said "why", and she wouldn't tell me. <u>contrast</u> Maddie 602 I didn't know, and its kind of 603 confusing because you would hear noises from downstairs and 604 then nothing would happen next and then you'd think shall I 605 go downstairs	Davy, Maddie
	Fantasy re: parental conflict  - nightmares  - daytime imagery	Davy 340 [T]he nightmares I get is when dad's chasing me and his 341 hair's on fire 343 ...sometimes I had nightmares, you know those Walkman things 344 you get, used to have nightmares that that would come after me 345 with a knife and things. 361 It's not when I'm asleep either, sometimes I'm awake and 362 I'm running down the stairs and I can still see this image chasing 363 me.	Davy, Jack
	Children's intervention in parental conflict  - attempts to stop conflict  - joining in conflict	Zena 061 And they used to argue a lot. Me and 062 Hannah used to get really angry that they were arguing because we used to come 063 down and kept going "stop, stop, stop!" but it never used to work. <u>contrast</u> Rebecca 107 and then daddy was in the kitchen door over 108 there and me and Tiffany were hitting daddy	Zena, Rebecca
	Forcing child to choose between parents	Davy 275 [day police arrested dad] was a school day... I came back from school, 276 there was like, dad was picking me up and so was mum and I 277 didn't know who to go with. 287 I can't remember who I went with. 295 [I felt] [t]errible.	Davy, Catherine
<i>Threat of Separation (7)</i>	Parent fighting and RP telling NRP to leave	Sebastian 079 And I can remember mum saying "if you're going 080 to keep on fighting with me you might as well just get out! if that's what 081 you want?"	Rebecca, Sebastian, Jack
	Parents informing child of separation  - unexpected  - expected	Headley 038 it was really unexpected really 039 because we were just sitting in the lounge happily together and 040 then they suddenly called us in and said they 041 were going to split up. <u>contrast</u> Maddie 089 and then one night 090 dad said "come and sit down for a 091 minute" and I knew he was going to say. He told us that, he 092 said "me and my mum aren't getting on very well" and I knew 093 he was then to say "we're not going to live together any more"	Maddie, Catherine, Headley, Rebecca, Malcolm

<i>Events of acute separation (14)</i>	NRP deciding to leave the RP/family	Rebecca 069 and then they had an argument and then 070 um daddy said to mummy he didn't love her any more, and he 071 went out of the door.	Catherine, Sebastian, Rebecca
	Parent gone/suddenly not there	Sebastian 115 when he left, I ran into my bedroom and shut the door. I didn't 116 know that I should come out because "mum, have you stopped shouting yet?" 117 And there was this like "yeah" [representing mum]. 117 "Where's dad?" [representing self; whining] 118 "Gone!" [Representing mum; blunt manner]	Catherine, Sebastian, Malcolm
	Child's response to separation	Malcolm 252 I used to 253 think about all the other times he told me off. 254 So when I first got told, I had just got told off by him and I was 255 thinking 256 good riddance... but after a few days I sort of thought about 257 it and sort of thought will it be better if he left or should he stay?	Malcolm, Jack, Claire
	NRP moving out of home	Rebecca 346 it was in the evening, and packed his 347 clothes and that..... and then went out of the door. Catherine 048 And one day 049 daddy was not there and mum said he'd moved to his new caravan 050 park.	Jocelyn, Zena, Headley, Maddie, Catherine, Davy, Rebecca
	Not remembered when parents separated  - as baby  - as child	Jocelyn 058 I can't remember my 059 parents splitting up at all, really. <u>contrast</u> Samantha 064 all I can remember 065 was that my mum and dad had split up then, so I would have 066 been about four or five or something like that. That is as far as I 067 can remember back. I can't remember anything at all.	Bradley, Samantha (separated twice), Rosie, Jocelyn
<i>Orientat'n in NRP new life (6)</i>	First visit to NRP's home	Harvey 203 I first thought about, the very first thing I can 204 remember, was the time I was at my dad's house 205 and I cried because I didn't really understand what 206 was going on Michael 204 he [dad] squatted in the house... 209 ...when I went to see him it was freezing cold all 210 the time, had to wear two jumpers	Harvey, Rebecca, Michael
	Difficulties with new partner – child family integration	Rebecca 159 it seems hurting and sad when I see 160 [girlfriend] and daddy together, and not, it should be mummy and daddy 161 but not her and daddy... 186 and I can't tell [girlfriend] that I hate her 187 because I think that [girlfriend] would tell daddy and I'd get smacked. Headley 308 When Melanie's by the phone when I'm talking to daddy, 310 ...I don't really want Melanie [dad's girlfriend] by the phone.... 320 It feels like I don't have a private life, I don't have any privacy, 321 it's really none of her business	Rebecca, Headley, Michael
	Events of new partnership - remarriage  - pregnancy	Rosie 069 He'd got married. <u>contrast</u> Samantha 003 his girl- 004 friend's pregnant so I'm going to have another sister or 005 brother.	Samantha, Rosie

<i>Events distancing NRP (8)</i>	Deciding with whom the child shall live - between parents - by child	Bradley 160 They have had 161 two squabbles about who's having me and who's not. <u>contrast</u> Tim 076 Now, when I'm going to live with my dad.	Catherine, Tim, Bradley
	Child moving houses	Samantha 146 I have had loads of moves. The most difficult part I would have 147 thought was schools, 155 ...That was quite a difficult time moving.	Samantha, Bradley, Zena
	Managing greeting and leaving (transitions)	Maddie 423 I think, um, it, it's kind of, me and 424 my dad now we kind of say "Hello" [in a formal voice], 425 and it's not "Hello, hi! We'll go home now" [in a very cheerful 426 voice], it's not always straightaway, you have to have a few 427 minutes like in the car or something to talk and get started up Samantha 089 I get a bit upset 090 about coming back from dad's because I don't know what is 091 going to happen, like for another fortnight, whether he is going 092 to be okay.	Maddie, Samantha
	Travelling to and fro	Harvey 143 It's a pain the journey.	Sam, Harvey, Headley
<i>Presence in NRP's new life (9)</i>	Not being able to see enough of NRP	Davy 412 ..I used to be able to see my mum but at the moment I can't 413 see her because she's like, she sleeps in the day because she's got 414 a night shift.	Zena, Jack, Davy, Malcolm
	Being/not being with NRP on special occasions  - not being together  - superficially together  - being together	Harvey 306 I always have my Christmas here on 307 Christmas Day, 308 I wonder what it would be like at my dad's house? <u>contrast</u> Sebastian 181 on 182 Christmas it was really fun. I got to stay up until midnight, because 183 dad went out. I said "grandma what time is dad going to be here" and she 184 said "he's probably at the pub". Well he went out with his wife and then 185 went to a pub for about an hour, came back about midnight then he 186 couldn't drive us home so we had to sleep overnight. And then finally we 187 had to walk home. Because like, he couldn't wake up. <u>contrast</u> Samantha 260 I love like 261 um my birthday, that's just gone, my dad came down and we all 262 just like had like a sort of party really.	Sebastian, Bradley, Harvey
	NRP staying local or moving away	Headley 253 ... he's going to move further into Bath and then 254 I'll get even more traffic and more travelling, and I like Bath, 255 used to live there before but I just don't want to be there, just 256 the travelling, travelling got me down..	Bradley, Headley, Maddie
<i>Importance of child to NRP (8)</i>	Evidence of love /wanting child from NRP	Catherine 085 I got my brand-new bike, 087 I said 088 daddy it's a lot of money, I thought you said you can't afford that 089 sort of stuff. He said money doesn't matter as long as you like 090 it. [Voice proud and impressed] Yeah, he bought me that!	Catherine, Sebastian, Davy
	Signs of child not being a priority to NRP	Headley 224 ...he says he wants to see me, and if he'd just co- 225 operate maybe I could see him a bit more, because I used to 226 see him like Tuesdays and Thursdays and then every other 227 weekend.	Maddie, Davy, Michael, Malc, Headley, Rebecca

<i>continued</i>	Responding to risk of being forgotten by NRP	Maddie 144 when I drive in the car I always 145 put a leaf or something 146 in there 147 And 148 whenever I come back it's always dead there but still there and 149 that makes me feel that he's not going to forget me.	Maddie
<i>Absence of NRP in child's life (5)</i>	Physical changes to home and to life	Maddie 537 now there's a room missing 538 which is the office and the whole house has changed, it's big 539 now, dad's gone, it's kind of you think well something's really 540 gone missing. It's not just Oh okay, dad's gone out I feel sad 541 even though half my body has gone practically because he's 542 not here.	Maddie
	Absence of a parent on child's experience of each parent	Maddie 265 it would be like altogether and we'd all be happy, and it 266 would just work out somehow and you could be more cross 267 with dad there because it's just, if you get cross with mum then 268 dad will sort it out and if you get cross with dad then mum 269 will sort it out	Maddie, Zena, Rosie
	Decisions about following NRP's past advice	Malcolm 186 I think dad's like that as well and I think I might have tried to 187 be like him when he left, so that's what made me like I am now 188 I think that was what I was trying to be him.	Malcolm
	Asking about NRP (and RP) welfare in child's absence	Headley 406 if he's got something ill, something ill with him. But he 407 won't tell me things, 408 whether he's got something going on with him that he won't let 409 other people know, and he's really worried about it, all those 410 kind of things, medical concerns. Maddie 162 I'm always like 163 "mum, do you mind being left on your own?" 166 And, I don't know, it's just like 167 she's kind of on her own, and as if she was moving out.	Headley, Maddie, (Maddie)
<i>Events about Communication (8)</i>	Parent to child – polarising parents' communication	Rebecca 619 I said "why did you throw a mug at 620 mum?" He said "I didn't throw it at your mummy, at mum, I 621 threw it at the sink, it was meant to hit the sink and then 622 mummy said it was meant to hit her..." 623 but I don't know if dad is lying 624 or I don't think mummy would lie to me... 644 ...one of them's got to be in the wrong	Catherine, Rebecca
	NRP and/or RP's explanations about PRB events given to child	Jocelyn 348 I think probably after it, somebody probably said 349 something about it, I probably asked as well	Jocelyn, Rebecca, Malcolm, Maddie, Zena

	Difficulties in child communication with NRP (both parents)	Rebecca 174 But then I 175 felt well I don't want to hold [dad's new partner]'s hand, I want hold [dad's] 176 hand but then I couldn't say that because I feel if I do say that I 177 feel like I'm going to get a smack or something or sent to my 178 bedroom when I get home. So I just had to hold her hand, 179 but I didn't really want to. <u>contrast</u> Headley 128 it's like um mummy's like 129 a magnet to tell her because like I know that she can help out, 130 but then she discusses it with daddy. Well daddy won't talk to 131 her now. If she discusses it with daddy I will probably get 132 told off and then it will start all over again, just like a big 133 circle. <u>contrast</u> Maddie 615 I'd like to know more now but I really wouldn't have 616 like to have known it then, I would've just said no I'm not 617 listening. 619 ...and dad would say oh well I'm afraid we are splitting 620 up, they'd cry and go up their room by themselves once they'd 621 known, I didn't want that, I wanted it to last for long, I wanted 622 not to know and then afterwards when I got over it, like now, 623 I'd like to know <u>contrast</u> Samantha 112 I go down to dad's it's quite difficult, because I 113 tend to talk about what happened up here, not sure if he gets 114 upset because, like I talk about what happened here, I don't talk 115 to him about what is going to happen but um with mum I can 116 talk about anything.	Rebecca, Samantha, (Maddie, Headley, Catherine)
	- fear of punishment		
	- involvement in parental conflict		
	- not wanting to know-		
	- parent vulnerable		
	Sibling discussions	Catherine 044 she was told, 'cos me and Claire have chats <u>contrast</u> Maddie 086 me and Annie, we're kind of in, 087 we'd be in the bedroom and talking to each other about each 088 other and saying do you think they're going to split it up	Catherine, Maddie
Ongoing conflict (6)	Being told off unnecessarily by NRP	Malcolm 251 When he told me off, I used to think why the hell does he keep telling me off 252 and no one else,... and I used to 253 think about all the other times he told me off. Headley 108 I had a swimming contest the local 109 championships for swimming, and I went and I was just an 110 hour late and my dad didn't react 115 at mummy. When he got home he like 116 told me off 117 I just 118 like want to do my sports! Seems as if he's jealous that... 122 he didn't get as much opportunities 123 as me when he was younger.	Rebecca, (Malcolm; pre-PRB), Headley
	- in the past		
	- in the present		
	Child amidst conflict between parents	Zena 111 ...it's 112 like silly when you stand in the middle of the room and they are still arguing while 113 you're in the middle.	Catherine, Jack, Headley, Zena
	Conflict between NRP and child	Headley 275 ... he has to keep on 276 having arguments with me about whether I can go to football 277 or not or to swimming, you know to parties which I really 278 want to go to because they're really fun.	Headley, Rebecca



<i>Wider social context (7)</i>	Extended family taking sides	Davy 089 My Nan. [mum's mum] 093 She's a witch.... 116 because she's horrible, because she tries to tell me that my 117 dad's wrong. [fidgeting] <u>contrast</u> Claire. No. Catherine got really upset once because they started saying horrible things they think about gran. Researcher. Does that upset you? Claire. No. Researcher. Why not? Claire. Because, it doesn't upset me because I know that sometimes gran says horrible things about dad. So I thought, it is fair.	Davy, Claire
	- unfair		
	- fair		
	Peers' "support"	Sam 375 When I used to talk to Tessa, my best friend, I 376 used to like say how I felt and what was happening, that I'd 377 like them to get back together, but she would just like say to me 378 well don't worry, you know, it's not going to happen, and you 379 know that, and just like sort of, really go along, live your life 380 really. <u>contrast</u> Rebecca 734 I talk to friends 735... my, Elizabeth -her parents are having a little 736 argument - and she listens to me and responds to me too	Rebecca, Zena, Samantha
	- dismissive		
	- supportive		
	Peers asking about PRB	Claire 217 one day Josh came round to sleep, 218 he said where's your dad 219 because we always used to rough and tumble on 220 him, and then I had to say to him that he got 221 divorced with mum so he won't be seeing us any 222 more, only weekends.	Claire, Maddie, Samantha
	Peer discussion highlights PRB/non-PRB differences	Maddie 396 it makes me kind of scared and 397 also when people are saying um telling jokes about what their 398 mum said to their dad when there were some other friends 399 around, I was thinking, kind of thinking how come they get to 400 have their mum and dad together and everyone be telling jokes 401 um as well as them two, instead of kind of looking at them 402 sideways at each other and telling jokes to everyone else 403 instead.	Davy, Jocelyn, Maddie

**Example Lower Order Themes and Event Themes that contributed to the emergence of the theme of Shattered Assumptions of Permanency**

Lower Order Theme/Event Theme	Example Quotation
<p>Representations of former family life Re: parental relationship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No conflict/no change</li> <li>- Low conflict-based change</li> <li>- Long-term Conflict</li> </ul>	<p>Headley – “they told us at the weekend on the Sunday that they were just going to split up. And um it was really unexpected really because we were just sitting in the lounge happily together and then they suddenly called us in and said they were going to split up. [R So you didn’t really expect it at all then?] No. Because they just seemed too happy together”.</p> <p><u>Contrast</u></p> <p>Rebecca – “I just assumed it was a little argument...” “It’s just that I thought that daddy was never going to do that [leave] because I thought daddy loved mummy very much and mummy loved daddy very much. Daddy loves mummy visa versa”</p> <p>Catherine “...they used to be friends and get on well...we used to play games and have water fights and then they started fighting about the bills, any little minor thing and they started swearing and they went into lots of fight about little things”</p> <p><u>Contrast</u></p> <p>Zena – “...and they used to argue a lot. Me and Hannah used to get really angry that they were arguing because we used to come down and kept going “stop, stop, stop!” but it never used to work. <i>And in the end</i> mum and dad decided they would probably split up”.</p>
<p>Practical changes highlighting the change in parental and family relationships</p>	<p>Catherine – “and we stopped going on holiday with [dad]... Once we went camping with mum, Gran and dad and it was a disaster” ...“I felt sad that [parents] wouldn’t go together [on holiday activity] and play with us together...and we had to make our minds [which parent to go with]...someone would always be left alone”.</p> <p>Maddie – “now there’s a room missing which is the office and the whole house has changed, it’s big now, dad’s gone, it’s kind of you think well something’s really gone missing. It’s not just Oh okay, dad’s gone out I feel sad even though half my body has gone practically because he’s not here”.</p>
<p>Parental conflict followed by parent gone/suddenly not there</p> <p>Realisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sudden</li> <li>- Sudden but after initial departure</li> <li>- Gradual</li> </ul>	<p>Sebastian – “And I can remember mum saying “if you’re going to keep on fighting with me you might as well just get out!” And then dad just said “okay I’ll leave”, and then he left”.</p> <p><u>Contrast</u></p> <p>Jack – “And one of the night’s my mum found a love letter in my dad’s bag and she started arguing, shouting at dad and dad started shouting at her as well. And then mum lost her temper, threw his bag out of the house and said to him get out. I was really crying, I was nearly sick”.</p> <p><u>Contrast</u></p> <p>Rebecca – “I thought um they had a little argument but I never thought that daddy would leave me for another lady. But then when mummy was very sad I thought there was something going on and I just assumed it was a little argument and that’s why he wasn’t coming here very often because he didn’t want to see mummy. And then mummy told me what happened and that’s why he was coming back late and then they had an argument and then um daddy said to mummy he didn’t love her any more, and he went out of the door”.</p>

Separation producing uncharacteristic changes in the child-parent relationship	<p>Maddie – “before he was very like a Yo-yo, he'd be going everywhere the whole time but now it's just like the string's broken and he's gone to [     ] and he's not here any more. He's just gone, really”.</p> <p>Zena – “He always used to give me a cuddle and a bedtime story ... It's like, he's always taking my brother and sister out. I think may be he thinks that because I'm the oldest, it doesn't matter as much because I'm old and I had lots of times like when I was younger, but he hardly ever takes me out any more...” [sad voice].</p>
Child's responses to separation suggesting something in relationship had changed	<p>Rebecca – “I was really scared because I thought he was never going to come back, I's never going to see him again. Why has daddy done this to me? He hurt my feelings too. I felt like, he still loves me and that but, if you still love me why have did he hurt our feelings? If you love someone you don't hurt their feelings”.</p> <p>Claire – “The scariest bit was I wouldn't have had any mum or dad any more”.</p> <p>Sebastian – “Well like he's gone and I don't think I'll see him again”</p>

### Exceptions to the Theme of Shattering of Assumption of Permanency

**Harvey and Evan** – babies at the time of separation. Their representations of the family was therefore influenced by the post-PRB family structure. They never needed to question the assumption of their form of permanency in early middle childhood as they had remembered nothing different. This interpretation triangulates with Evan's family drawings showing his mum and brother as the central figures in his life.

**Bradley** – also a baby at separation. Likewise, he had lived most of his life in a post-PRB family but unlike Harvey and Evan, his new families were not settled and the assumption of permanency with his dad was never stabilised. He developed an ideal representation of a two-parent family (perhaps from the videos of life before PRB) that he continues to seek in order to achieve a sense of permanency.

**Tim** – story restricted to a single sparse narrative about the future event of living with his dad. He was not prepared to elaborate his story or describe other events

**Mike** – did not mention events at the time of separation. His circumstances perhaps meant that he was exposed to a long period of non-containment predating PRB with fears for his family's personal safety. In addition he had to move house due to mortgage repossession. His dad moved in a squat making the separation process quite complicated. Note however that although the timing of the undermining of the assumption was not specifically labelled, Mike remembered that dad had been "a sort of nice person, and he could be" and recalled positive events together when his family was perhaps 'permanent' before he discovered "how violent he could be". His search for a new permanency remains unresolved.

**Rosie and Jocelyn** – Jocelyn was very young at separation and like Rosie reported not remembering it. Rosie and Jocelyn's experiences of the separation were also confused by separation due to hospitalisation at around the same period.

**Extract of Claire's Abridged Story**

Claire described the same initial fear of abandonment described by many of the children.

120 C The scariest bit was I wouldn't have had any  
121 mum or dad any more.

However, after this initial fear her dad's resumption of contact easily reassured Claire as the relationship quality remained much as before separation.

131 Once dad had got a new home and we  
132 kept on seeing him every two weeks, it got better  
133 and I seem to like the idea...

150 I thought "this is good, I get to see  
151 him, and also I get to listen to his voice and I still get  
152 to do things with him".

Claire implies that the fears returned when her dad reduced contact.

152 But then he started going on  
153 to one week and we don't see him and then another  
154 we see him.

The apparent ease in overcoming this fear reoccurred when Claire's dad eventually changed job to see more of the children.

154 But then one day Daddy said to see him  
155 only one day every once a month then mum got  
156 a fight on him, on the telephone again. So then dad  
157 thought "oh yeah, I am going to miss them". So I  
158 think he quit his shifts so long and then he went on  
159 seeing us every twice a week.

Claire reframed the experience very positively ("I am going to miss them") and this also suggested a high degree of confidence in her attachment and strong assumptions that she was 1) loveable and 2) of importance to her dad and thus was held in mind. The author hypothesised that for Claire, the experience of fears of abandonment was short, not fulfilled and the prospect of abandonment could be disconfirmed intrapsychically, leaving her with a continued representation of herself as loved and of importance to her parents (representations she and Catherine had shared in their stories).

**Extracts of Mike's Abridged Story**

Mike's story commenced with descriptions of the violence his dad had shown towards his mum, her dog and his sister, Laurel. For example,

11                    my father, he used to beat my mum up quite a  
12                    lot and my mum's dog. ...

He did not describe the violence shown towards him. His mum reported that Mike was a victim of his dad's violence on occasions and was prepared to stand up to his dad in the past which might explain Mike's reference to his dad being "stubborn" but "he didn't get his own way" (34-35).

Mike's story moved on to after the separation. The author commented that Mike's story was dominated by memories of before the separation era. Mike explained why, unlike most children in this study, he did not have memories of the separation itself.

222                    They weren't really together at the end stages because  
223                    we, our house got repossessed so we moved into a  
224                    house in Henley, he squatted in the house until people  
225                    came round and saw  
229                    When I went to see him it was  
230                    freezing cold all the time, I had to wear two jumpers... stuff  
231                    like that. Never really *did* much.

The separation occurred in unusual circumstances that complicated the departure of his dad from the family. Mike explained his initial feelings of responsibility for the break up and how they changed.

187                    ...when I was about 7, 8.  
191                    I thought it was all my fault that they split up and  
192                    so did Laurel.  
196                    I  
197                    just felt they split up because they didn't get on and they  
198                    didn't get on with me when we are all together  
207                    I realise now that it wasn't it really anything  
208                    to do with me or my sister, just that they had problems.

Mike moves on to two years ago to describe when he used to visit his dad. His mum reported that the 18 months of seeing his dad alone (as Laurel did not want to see her dad) were happy for Mike and he came home and told her what he did with his dad over the weekend. This all changed when Laurel started seeing her dad too and Mike lost his special position with his dad as Laurel was favoured. Laurel got on well with dad's new wife also but Mike did not. Mike describes this relationship:

47                    he married somebody else that didn't really get  
48                    on with me that well. So, she didn't really like me that much.  
52                    when dad was out, she told me to go to my  
53                    room.

Mike leaves out a large segment of this story, of the favouritism shown to Laurel and the complaints by his dad about his behaviour leading to his dad rejecting Mike and Laurel. His mum provides the events that end Mike's contact with his dad:

"his father will phone me up, "What have you done to Mike all week? His behaviour is disgusting". And, it got to the last straw, two years ago this July, he phoned me up Sunday morning said "Come and collect the children I don't want them here any more, I'm sick and tired of Mike and I don't want anything else to do with them".

Mike's visiting ended in violence as Mike's mum was violently assaulted by dad when she collected Mike and Laurel.

288            my mum came to pick us up from this  
289            flat, he had a sort of a row.  
290            ...he started trying to push her  
291            down the stairs and kicking and punching her, and we had to  
292            call the police, but they don't really do a lot.  
292            And that's the  
293            last I really saw of him.

Mike then describes his feelings about losing this contact.

64            I can't trust him to be  
65            with me because he's such a violent person.  
67        R.        What's that like for you?  
69        M        Upsetting sometimes, and scary others because  
70            like you don't know what he's going to do.  
72        R        What's the upsetting bit?  
74        M        The upsetting bit is that um.... well, he never  
75            really had a life.  
79            Well he didn't have many friends. Basically he  
80            was sort of a loner, if you know what I mean. I felt sorry for  
81            him.

This sadness and scariness is not explained further but information from the CBCL and his mum's interview suggests that Mike may identify with some of the imagined feelings of his dad as he too is a loner with few friends. "He doesn't make friends at school particularly well. He has one or two friends but you wouldn't call them his best friends....since he's got older, his father's the same, his father doesn't have any friends."

Mike describes his dad's present contact.

86            he's been  
87            phoning up, prank calling ...  
92            he just goes like (M breathes heavily)  
93            and then he put the phone down.  
97        M        He only wants to talk to one of us which is  
98            my sister Laurel. He doesn't want to speak to anybody else.  
100       R        What does that make you feel like?  
102       M        Makes me feel like he hates me. I don't really mind about that,  
103            because, I mean, I don't really get along  
104            with him that well. I used to, but I don't really any more.

Mike receives a clear message of rejection from his dad and favouritism towards Laurel. The rejection implies that his dad was not prepared to contain Mike's feelings of anger and distress, instead Mike may be hypothesised to receive the message that showing such

feelings leads to rejection. He verbally dismisses the rejection (perhaps as a defence against the pain of acknowledging it is important to him) but also reveals that he remembers a time when he did "get along" with his dad. Mike describes his relationship with his dad at age 5-6.

110           He taught me a lot of things, he taught me how to read,  
111           taught me how to catch a ball,  
112           stuff like that.

Mike explained that he "didn't really know how violent he could be. ...Now I realise that he is a really violent person."

Mike describes the difficulty he has keeping those memories of his dad being a good person alive.

136           Most of the stuff I usually find out for myself,  
137           stuff that I really don't tell mum and don't  
138           really want to tell mum. She wouldn't understand.  
148           She won't understand that, well, he was half a nice  
149           person. He was a sort of nice person, and he could be.

The ability for children to be able to talk openly about the positive aspects of the NRP to the RP has varied considerably amongst the children, forming a dimension along the theme of parent abilities to contain positive and negative feelings about the other parent. A hypothesised consequence of this was that Mike had to *maintain the presence of his father* alone and receive little affirmation of the loveable aspects of his dad. The author wondered what impact this had on Mike's sense of self as throughout the story there are references by Mike and his mum as to the resemblance of Mike to his dad. His mum reported: "he's so like his father, this is what worries me, that I think it's something genetic, I don't know why but I just do because he is just so like him".

Mike's self-representation closely identified with what he knew of his father:

233    R       Tell me about this kind of, seeing two sides of  
234           your dad. The side that taught you to read.  
236    M       Yes, there's a good side and a bad side.  
241           Well, I'm not sounding big headed but I'm quite  
242           clever...and he was quite a good drawer, and I'm quite  
243           good. Good at stuff, and bad at certain stuff.

There were also aspects of his dad he was uncertain about (which he has already explained he does not receive clarification from his mum about).

251           Some of the stuff may be a bit, well, false because some of the  
252           stuff I got out of my father and he can exaggerate the truth  
253           a bit, or lie.

Whilst Mike on the one hand appears to welcome his similarity to his dad in drawing etc. he also fears resembling him in other ways.

406           I don't really like being... the problem is that he's a  
              violent person and I don't want to be a violent person.  
418           That's one of my biggest worries.



Mike describes how he tries to manage this worry.

- 429 I'm trying to stay calm.  
434 Just have to use the force and not be angry.  
445 R Sounds like you're working really hard.  
447 M (instantly says) I am! Not listening to people when  
448 they're being stupid and stuff. Just keeping my anger down.  
450 R Is there anybody who you feel safe to be angry  
451 with?  
453 M Not that I can think of.  
457 I can get angry with 'Ran and Stimpy' on TV.  
466 I just like hold my anger down, as much as I can.

Mike's mum reported that Mike's refusal to get angry with other children at school has meant he has been bullied also. For Mike, his feelings are dangerous, through his story he has described these dangers of family being hurt and of his dad being rejected and rejecting him.

Mike's situation remains unresolved due to his dad's constant telephone harassment. Mike had been forced to accept the limited scope for a relationship with his dad due to his dad's behaviour but also because his dad had openly rejected Mike. Yet dad's "prank calling" are totally insensitive to Mike's needs, not only preventing him from being able to resolve his grief at losing his dad but was also a constant reminder of his dad's rejection of him, undermining Mike's view of himself as loveable and his capacity to move on. Mike describes his anger at his dad "still phoning!".

- 332 he just  
333 won't get off our backs.  
337 I'm angry about that, it  
338 makes me feel really angry and he won't let up, like  
he's very.... I can't say it on this tape.  
349 It makes me feel really, really angry and 'peep  
peep' off!

Finally, Mike describes what it is like to live with this anger at his dad.

- 372 R What did you do with those feelings [towards dad]?  
375 M I just hide them away in the cupboard of the back of my  
376 head, and just lock them up.  
380 ....they feel away from me at times.  
384 Other times, well, they come out and they start  
385 getting really mad and I keep losing my temper with him.  
386 I try not to think about him that much.  
  
295 I just  
296 want to move on and forget about him. But I *can't*!  
297 It's stuck in my memory forever (voice sad, sulky).

Mike was not being held in mind by his dad as his dad did not consider nor prioritise Mike's emotional needs. Mike was neither able to demand dad's attention in order to have his needs met (as seen when his dad sent him away) nor able to ask his dad to leave him to adapt to life without his dad: "I just want to move on and forget about him but I *can't*" (295).

**Extract of Jack's Abridged Story and Family Picture**

The author began to notice that some children seemed to identify with one parent more than the other and this appeared quite a significant factor in some children's view of themselves. Mike was an extreme example of this. Jack is a less clear example. When stories were compared to test this hypothesis, the author noticed that Jack's picture shows himself and his dad as almost identical in physical attributes, size and position relative to the females of the family (particularly his mother). Jack said little in his story about his relationship with his dad except that it had not really changed since the separation.

Although Jack was told that it was dad's choice to leave his mum and him, Jack suggested his dad's departure in the story was due to his mum's rejection of dad after an argument over a love letter mum had found.

095                    then mum lost her temper, threw his bag out of the house and  
096                    said to him "get out!" I was really crying, I was nearly sick.

When asked what did he make of it?

100        J            Really scary.  
102        R            Yes. What was the scariest bit?  
104        J            Well I was nearly sick.

After this incident, Jack's mum reported that Jack had nightly nightmares of voices shouting. These dreams had not been linked to the real shouting of his parents by Jack or his parents.

Jack said he thought:

150                    mum didn't want to see [dad] again, I don't think"

Mum reported that Jack was concerned about her dying and leaving him.

Jack was left with an incongruent explanation for the separation. When asked by the author whether there were any bits of the story he did not understand, he said:

216 All of it really.

When asked why his dad left he said:

230 Why my dad left? Not very sure really.

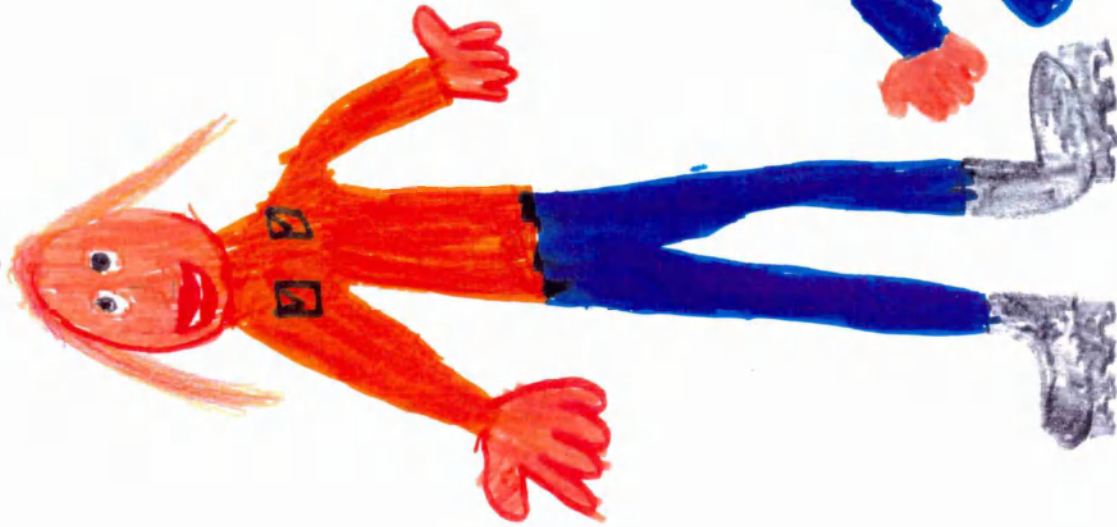
It might be hypothesised therefore that although Jack had been given one explanation, he was left in much greater doubt as to who was the rejected person.

Mum reported that Jack's school teacher had told her he had become upset in class during story time about a daddy rabbit: "Jack just shouted my daddy's not very good because he left."

It was hypothesised that if his dad was perceived at some level to be rejected by mum and he identifies closely with his dad, then he may perceive a risk of mum rejecting him too.

Jack's fears seemed to be gradually alleviated as mum became less depressed and more emotionally available for Jack, his dreams subsided. He spent time away from mum with dad. It was not possible to identify the strategies Jack employed to manage his fears of rejection in their height, however, mum reported considerable attentiveness to her needs and those of his sister. He continued to identify closely with his dad and had concerns about "hurting" dad but is cautiously aware of and sensitive to his mum's reactions. His mum reported: "I do know that he has felt that he can't say things to me because he doesn't want hurt me, and he won't say things to his dad because he doesn't want hurt his dad is well."

mum



Lily



me



Dad



PLEASE NOTE : NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED

WILKINSON, M. 24. 10. 10

**Extract of Maddie's Abridged Story**

Maddie began to describe her previous experience of her dad going away and then returning with concerns about him being away.

140                dad worked in this [        ] and we always, it wasn't like he was  
141                not, we weren't going to see him for long, it was like he could  
142                come back and just be fine.

She describes the familiar pattern in her family of her dad going away for work and knowing that he would come back and she would feel secure that it would "just be fine". This was characterised as Maddie's 'assumption of permanency'. It varied from some other children's assumptions as she was used to her dad being absent a great deal from the family home, sometimes great distances away.

The author hypothesised that since Maddie was used to her dad's absence for work, she had grown used to relying upon familiar objects of her dad's to remind her of his continuing presence in the family and the permanency of his presence even when away. The removal of her dad's belongings represented the undermining of this permanence clarifying to Maddie emotionally that he was not on just another work trip.

113                um, the house changed,  
114                um, um, everything changed. I didn't really  
115                like it, I wanted it to be the same so that I could still remember  
116                him  
119                But it's, I'm kind of worried that later I won't  
120                remember this, and I kind of get these feelings that it, there's  
121                nothing to remember dad and nothing is going to, we won't  
122                never get to remember him again, even though we see him  
123                every weekend it's still like he's not here.

The absence of these objects meant the eradication of her dad from the remaining family life and highlighted perhaps her mum's very real attempt to forget Maddie's dad. Maddie feared that without the reminders in the house she too might forget him.

142                ...now he's moved out it's just  
143                like there's nothing to remember

From talking about forgetting her dad in line 143, in line 144 she describes her attempts not to be forgotten by her dad also.

144                And I also, whenever I leave, when, I drive in the car I always  
145                put a leaf or something, he's got those drawers for smoking  
146                (laughs), and I always put a leaf in there or a branch of  
147                something, and it's just because I do, I don't know why. And  
148                whenever I come back it's always dead there but still there and  
149                that makes me feel that he's not going to forget me.

This leaf appeared to represent for Maddie a reminder of her for and with dad when she was back living with her mum as a strategy for reassurance that she will be held in mind when absent.

This strategy to relieve her fears of being forgotten does not entirely work. She describes her ongoing fears of not being held in mind once she is back home. Again, there is a reciprocal issue of wanting to know about her dad's whereabouts and also wanting her dad to know about her.

168           it's quite complicated ...I don't  
169           understand what's going to happen to dad now, because if he  
170           was living at home he could say "I'm going to France now and  
171           I won't be back until two weeks, don't worry I will phone you  
172           up on Sundays" but when he's in [        ] he has to phone  
173           me up and say " Hello! I am going..." and it's kind of as if he's  
174           miles away already without, without going to France or  
175           wherever. And, (very quietly) it's just really horrible.  
177       R       It feels as though it's really difficult to kind of keep track in  
178           your mind of where he is.  
180       M       Yeah.  
182       R       And you wonder if he does the same with you?  
183       M       Yeah I don't know because, he's always saying "I'll never  
184           forget you" on the phone or "I'll phone", um, "Please phone  
185           me up soon", and, because he's working all the time, um,  
186           needs us to phone up him, but when we don't because  
187           we're doing something else or something, I don't know what  
188           he's feeling. Because if he's not here then I don't know what  
189           he's actually doing or feeling or (sigh) what's happening.

Maddie describes the effect of this distancing. The theme that emerges from this is of Maddie feeling aware of her own absence from her dad's new life so far away and her desire to be part of it. Yet her fear is that she is not.

200       M       It's like, for instance, it's a Yo-yo, before he was  
201           very like a Yo-yo, he'd be going everywhere the whole time  
202           but now it's just like the string's broken and he's gone to  
203           Winchester and he's not here any more. He's just gone, really.

Maddie's description of him "just gone" resembles a description of abandonment and the break from the permanence of a "yo-yo" pattern of contact. Maddie describes the significance of the long journeys to and from her dad as a constant reminder of the distance she is from her dad and perhaps an awareness of her absence from his life so far away.

128           when  
129           I'm getting onto the train. It's just like I'm never going to see  
130           him again like I'm moving to a different country.

### Themes of Parental Containment

Sub-Theme & No, Partic'ts	Definition	Quote
<b>Willingness and ability to share proximity (8)</b>	<p>Parent's ability to share proximity with the other parent. Involves:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) appropriately managing any negative feelings towards the other parent and</li> <li>2) maintaining ability to discuss parenting issues</li> </ol> <p>Consequences: Important to enable the child not to have to choose between parents or become embroiled in parental conflict as a 'go-between'.</p>	<p>Samantha's: "I love having weekends when like my dad comes up or something on a Saturday or Sunday ...so it's like both of them together".</p> <p><u>Contrast</u></p> <p>Headley's dad is no longer prepared to discuss matters directly with his mum, instead communicating through solicitor's letter. Due to Headley's dad being unwilling to communicate directly with Headley's mum, Headley found himself embroiled in the parental conflict (triangulation).</p> <p>"I just don't want to like go everywhere and get involved in everything that I hear or see. Besides I'd be knee deep in more havoc!"</p>
<b>Parent's differing or conflicting stories of PRB "good versus evil" (6)</b>	<p>Where parents reveal differing and incongruent stories of PRB that may imply blaming of the other parent</p> <p>Consequences: can make the child feel they must take sides, producing a 'loyalty dilemma'.</p>	<p>Cathy: I want to know if my mum is evil and done this all to daddy... I'm getting panicked that I'll like just get pushed a little bit more on to mum's side... it would change the way I talk to [dad], and what sort of things we did"</p> <p><u>Contrast</u></p> <p>Harvey: no suggestion of parent "evil" or wrong</p>
<b>Showing interest in the child (10)</b>	<p>Emotional capacity to take an interest in activities, interests and special occasions of the child that are integral to the child's sense of self as loveable/valuable.</p> <p>Consequences: child does not feel individual qualities and roles are valued which impacts on the child's perceived importance and loveability in relation to the parent.</p>	<p>Samantha: "I love, like, my birthday, that's just gone, my dad came down and we all just like had like a sort of party really".</p> <p><u>Contrast</u></p> <p>Headley: "I just want to do a bit of sports ...because he didn't get to do a lot, he's just seems a bit of jealousy from him.... he just doesn't make it clear that he cares about my development ..."</p> <p><u>Contrast</u></p> <p>Sebastian and Davy – almost no contact from NRP.</p>
<b>Preparedness to embrace aspects of the child's other parent (6)</b>	<p>Preparedness to embrace those aspects of the child that relate to the other parent non-judgementally showing a capacity to love the whole child.</p> <p>Consequences: child needing to hide/reject aspects of self and/or other parent.</p>	<p>Claire: "When dad's gone, mum always tells me little stories about Daddy (laughs)"</p> <p><u>Contrast</u></p> <p>Mike: "She won't understand that, well, [dad] was half a nice person."</p>
<b>Appropriate expression of negative feelings by the parent (6)</b>	<p>Refers to fears of being told off or when parents told the child off inappropriately due to venting anger or jealousy.</p> <p>Consequences: undermining the child's ability to relate openly with the parent and explore new avenues for their relationship.</p>	<p>Rebecca: "I was holding daddy's hand ...and then daddy said "what about [girlfriend]? You're leaving her out" ...I felt well "I don't want to hold [girlfriend]'s hand, I want hold your hand" but then I couldn't say that because I feel if I do say that I feel like I'm going to get a smack or something ...So I just had to hold her hand"</p> <p><u>Exception</u></p> <p>Sebastian, being told off was a form of attention and communication: "Now and again I <i>actually</i> asked dad to shout at me Because I like miss it from 5. It's like I..."[tearful and lost for words].</p>

<p><b>Perceived vulnerability of the parent</b>  <b>1) imposed burdening of parental emotions</b>  <b>(4)</b></p>	<p>Parental interaction that is laden with expressed emotion that is uncontained can sometimes have the quality of a burden for the child. The child feels obliged to take responsibility for the parent's wellbeing sometimes at the expense of their child role forcing adult responsibility for emotional issues beyond their years.</p>	<p>Headley: "When he got home he like told me off and has a discussion about it and I don't like those discussions because he makes himself so depressing ... I can use my instincts to know that there is something wrong but I don't know what and then I get worked up and then it all goes wrong".  <u>Contrast</u>  All but Samantha in the 'baby' group mentioned no such imposition from their NRP. Samantha does not describe an imposition but see below.</p>
<p><b>Perceived vulnerability of the parent</b>  <b>2) adoption of responsibility for underlying emotional vulnerability of the parent</b>  <b>(8)</b></p>	<p>Relates to the child's subtle interpretations of the parents' interaction with the child as emotionally or physically vulnerable.  Consequences:  1) Restriction of child's emotional and verbal expression and asking of questions  2) Reluctance to leave parent and assurance seeking  3) Worries and concerns about the parent when absent.</p>	<p>1) Samantha: "when I go down to dad's it's quite difficult, because I tend to talk about what happened up here, I'm not sure if he gets upset because, like, I talk about what happened here, I don't talk to him about what is going to happen"  "I never sort of say, but I do know that if I did say mum would probably get upset. She's like really tearful! I just never ask."  2/3) Maddie: "I'm always like, mum, do you mind being left on your own? Because ... it's like she's on her own and we're not thinking of her."</p>



**Example Reasons for Participation**

Participants who volunteered for the study were not random and appeared to have specific reasons for taking part:

1. Dissatisfaction with services (health or education) regarding a problem so thought the research may help
2. Parent hoping to find out if their child was OK
3. Interest in doing research
4. Parent working in therapy field and can see the value of the research
5. Word of mouth – suggestions from others including other participants